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No. 35.

Kentuck, the Sport; OR, DICK TALBOT at the MINES.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "THE SPOTTED DETECTIVE," "THE NEW
YORK SHARP," "OVERLAND KIT," "ROCKY
MOUNTAIN ROB," ETC.

PROLOGUE.

THE DEVIL'S CANYON.

"Go read the annals of the North,
And records there of many a wail,
Of marshaling and going forth
For missing sheriffs, and for men
Who fell and none knew where or when—

* * * * *
Go cross their wilds, as I have done,
From snowy crest to sleeping vales,
And you will find on every one
Enough to swell a thousand tales."

—JOAQUIN MILLER.

Down over the lava-beds, blackened by the action
of the volcanic fires, rushed the Pitt river.
From the borders of Oregon came the stream,
and for a hundred miles or more grim Mount Shas-



ta's snow-crowned peak kept watch and ward over the winding river.

Barren and desolate was the plateau through which the upper part of the stream flowed. The braves of the mountain tribes—the Shastas, McClouds, Pushas and Tonatons—aptly termed this dreadful waste the Devil's Garden; and the deep defile at the end of the lava formation, through which the mighty power of the headlong stream had cut a ragged way, they fitly called the Devil's Canyon. Little wonder that the superstitious red-men believed the evil spirit loved both barren waste and rude defile, for at the end of the canyon, where the stream rushed out into the valley, the geyser springs poured their jets of boiling water high into the air, and the cavity from which the hot stream spouted fresh from the subterranean chambers beneath, where the chemical action disturbed the repose of old mother Earth, seemed like to be the portal to the realms below.

The smoke from the white man's fire ascended not within the valley of the Pitt; civilization had not planted her banner there.

And, barren, desolate, the land seemed laboring under a curse. Even the red warriors bent their steps either to the north or south, and avoided the lava region, which afforded shelter only to noisome and venomous reptiles.

Almost timberless, too, was the country near to the stream, only a scattered growth of cedar and juniper.

The hot afternoon sun of an August day had sunk behind the snowy top of Shasta, when a powerfully-built, bronzed-faced, heavily-bearded man came slowly down the eastern slope washed by the river.

He carried a rifle, ready cocked, in the hollow of his arm, and carefully scrutinized the country before him as he came on. He was looking for a foe; he sought him amid the low growth of juniper by the bank of the stream; watched for the gleam of his rifle-barrel amid the dark clumps of cedar high up on the mountain side above the geyser springs.

But he saw neither the glistening barrel, nor the haggard, brown-bearded face that he sought, yet feared; and an exclamation of satisfaction came from his lips.

Descending to the stream, he stooped to drink. Hardly had he bent over the rushing water and lifted the first glittering drops to his parched lips, when, from the shelter of a neighboring boulder, behind which, snakelike, he had been lying in ambush, sprang a dark-faced, haggard-featured man.

With all the strength of the Oregon lion, lord of the lonely northern wastes, the new-comer struck the stranger a fearful blow behind the ear with his clenched fist. A single groan and the victim fell over on his side, stunned.

The assailant first bent over his victim, then stood erect and cast a hasty glance around, as if to assure himself that he was master of the field. No living thing was in sight, except the brawny stranger lying motionless by the side of the stream.

Then the victor stooped, and, removing the cord of untanned leather which he had wound many times around his waist, cut off two pieces, each about a yard in length, and with them he bound the helpless man hard and fast. This work completed, he stood erect and again looked around him, evidently pondering what next to do. The prey was in his hands, but he hesitated to kill him; death seemed so poor a vengeance.

His eyes fell upon a shelving rock, which extended out far over the rapid torrent, three hundred feet or more down the river; a scanty growth of juniper had gained a foothold amid the rocks, and the foliage extending over the stream was mirrored in the clear waters twenty feet below.

A fierce smile came over the thin features of the outcast and wanderer as he saw the overhanging rock, and a terrible scheme flashed into his mind.

Seizing the brawny form of his victim he cast it over his shoulder, thus plainly revealing his wondrous strength.

To the summit of the rock he bore the senseless form. Laying it prone upon the face, the outcast rove a running noose and placed it around the neck of his prisoner. The other end of the cord he fastened to the juniper roots. Then he sat down and waited for the stunned man to recover.

Slowly the senses of the stranger came back to him. It did not take him long to realize his position.

"Mercy!" he cried, piteously, looking up into the haggard face.

"What mercy did you or your gang show me?" the outcast sternly demanded.

"I but did another's bidding."

"And now must answer for it! You first, and then the rest, one by one; no mercy, no escape from my vengeance, except in death!"

Then the terrible avenger seized the man and swung him off the cliff, letting him descend slowly; he had adjusted the noose so as not to hang him outright.

From the bosom of the river a small rock lifted its jagged edges, the surface exposed just enough for a man to place his feet upon. As the doomed man's toes touched this rock, the merciless executioner tightened the cord around the roots of the juniper.

Half-suspended by the cord, half-resting his feet upon the rock, pinioned hand and foot, the stern-faced stranger felt as if death would be almost a blessing. A single motion would cast him from the rock, and then, the noose tightening, would send him to eternity. He feared to move, feared even to call aloud, although he knew that his companions could not be far off and might chance to come that way at any moment.

The avenger left the rock, went up the stream to the mouth of the canyon and there crossed by means of the rocks in the river to the other bank. On his way he had stopped and taken a rifle from behind the boulder which had served him as a place of ambush. He then found a seat upon a rock near where the geyser springs spouted out of the earth, his rifle laid across his lap; and from that seat he watched and waited for the pinioned wretch to die.

Slowly the light faded and the darkness came. Prayer and supplication, then oath and threat wildly delivered, came from the man who stood so near to the brink of eternity. One moment he would promise countless gold in exchange for liberty; the

next he would call down curses upon the head of his tormentor, and cry aloud that from the grave even he would rise for vengeance.

Darkness came, and executioner and culprit alike were hidden from each other's eyes.

The night wind surged gently through the cedar boughs and softly kissed the leaves of the juniper; the river ran steadily on, breaking in spray drops against the edges of the boulders in the stream, its waters even falling now and then upon the feet of the doomed man, as, despite his efforts, the weakening muscles were slowly yielding, and he was gradually slipping from the rock.

In the darkness, above the roar of the river, rushing and tumbling from the mouth of the canyon, above the sighing of the wind amid the cedar and juniper boughs, and its shrill whistle as it played in the hollows of the canyon, came the sound of a human voice, but now so unnatural, so unlike the voice of man, so shrill, harsh, and discordant, that it seemed more like the attempt of some giant ape to imitate his cultured descendant than like the tones of a human being.

Curses, too awful for ears to hear, or tongue to repeat; wild bursts of maniac laughter, followed by imploring cries for death to come, and yet, the speaker clung to the slippery surface of the rock with the desperation of despair.

Slowly the moon came up; it shone down on Shasta's crown of virgin snow, and Lassen's uncovered peaks—danced its beams along the river where a stolid, haggard man sat like a statue and watched the execution of the most terrible vengeance that a seared heart could wish, or an unsparing hand could execute.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE RED SNOW.

LIFTING its snow-crowned peak, fourteen thousand feet above the level of the sea, great Mount Shasta towers aloft, as if keeping watch and ward over Northern California.

Never melts the snow from Shasta's summit, no matter how fierce the warm spring rains or how torrid the heat of the summer sun.

Covered over with virgin snow, pure as when fresh from "Heaven's garners" it falls in feathery flakes upon the ancient volcano peak, the proud old mountain lifts its summit above the clouds, a landmark to the traveler for leagues around.

Approaching Shasta from the north, the slope is covered by a scanty growth of stunted cedar and oak, such is the poverty of the soil; scattered through the higher parts of this timber-belt are patches of chaparral which—sure proof of the barrenness of the soil—are termed the "Devil's Acres." At eight thousand feet above the level of the sea, the forest trees disappear, and a few hardy shrubs struggling for existence, take their place. At nine thousand feet, the shrubs die away, and then commences the growth of a low form of vegetable of a vermilion color, which, generated in and staining the white flakes, causes the belt to be known as the "red snow." At twelve thousand feet, even this vegetation ends, and from that height to the cone of the mountain stretches one vast field of untarnished snow.

Thirteen thousand two hundred and forty feet above the level of the sea, a rudely circular and nearly level place, evidently the bottom of an extinct crater, the northern side of which has been broken away, strongly proves Shasta's volcanic claim.

On the level arena, the steam and sulphurous gases constantly escaping, clearly show that the old-time fire still dimly burns within the heart of the mountain peak.

The clear sun of May was shining full upon the snowy peak; its beams also fell upon two human forms, tenants of the circular space upon the mountain's side.

The dusky skins of the two told that within their veins ran the red life-blood of the Indian.

One was a chief, as was amply proved by the eagle plumes braided in his hair, the massive wristlets of virgin gold, rudely formed by the stone hatchets of the savage, which he wore, and from the costly skins which protected him from the keen edge of the mountain air; also from his bearing, too, upright as the mountain pine, and his form builded with the strength of hammered brass by nature's loving hand.

Hee-ma-Nang-a (Sun-man) was chief of the Shasta tribe. The time had been when from the Sacramento to the Klomath lake—from the peaks of the Sierra Nevada to the spurs of the coast range, the braves of Shasta had been the lords of hill, valley and stream; Pusha, Sacramento, Tonaton, McCloud, Pah-Utah, all alike fled from the Shasta warriors, when they donned the war-paint, for were they not the favored children of the great spirit, Topitone, who dwelt on the top of the mighty peak of Shasta?

But another race had come, a tribe of bearded men, strangely clad, cruel and overbearing, armed with wondrous weapons, who dug into the bowels of the mountains, and turned the streamlet's course aside that they might delve in the sands beneath for the yellow grain which they called gold.

Hee-ma-Nang-a, chief of a hundred braves, the sole remnant of the once powerful tribe of Shasta, mourned over the lost hunting-grounds of his race, and with jealous eyes saw that each day added to the strength of the bearded men, and that, little by little, they had come nearer and nearer to the haunts of the red warriors.

The chief, standing within the circular space, with his back to the peak, was gazing, full-eyed, into the sun, as if seeking counsel from the god of his ancestors.

On the edge of the space, gazing northward down the valley, was the companion of the chief, an Indian girl, light in color, regular in features, and perfect in form.

With all the grace of a Diana, ancient goddess of the chase, she stood poised upon the lava-rock, clad in a garb of skins, her arms bare and adorned with golden bands, curiously hammered from the rough gold of the mountain "pocket." A fillet of skin bound around her temples confined the luxuriant raven hair that floated in tangled masses over her shapely shoulders. A single eagle-plume, the flight feathers of the princely bird, entwined amid her hair, told that she was the daughter of a chief.

Yuet-a (Moon) was the sister of the chief of the Shastas and the idol of the tribe.

Gazing northward, down the valley, afar off by the swift waters of the Shasta river, she saw the smoke curling upward on the air from the settlement of the whites, which, in their strange language, they called Cinnabar City.

Six months before, no smoke from a white man's fire rose within a day's walk of Shasta, but then there came a party of the bearded, red-shirted white men following the course of the river up from the town of Yreka; they came into the pleasant valley cut by the Shasta stream, and the quartz rock tumbled from the mountain side, as the pick-axes tore into the bosom of the cliff.

The prospectors had struck a "lead," and soon Cinnabar City had a local habitation and a name.

The Cinnabar City Quartz Mining Company, Richard Talbot, Superintendent, erected a mill with eight stamps; some smaller concerns put up mills, the adjacent country promised well, and, at the time of which we write, Cinnabar City had a population of over three hundred.

The whites wrought a wondrous change in the appearance of the country in a very little while. Huge tunnels were run into the sides of the mountains, water-power was directed against the dirt-hills and cut out great slices of earth, and in the bed of the river, just below the town, where a bar extended across it, the water had been turned a little from its course, so that the greater part of the bar was dry, and there a small settlement had sprung up, popularly known by the name of Angel's Bar.

Cinnabar City bid fair to grow into something of a place, for there was gold there in abundance, although not to be picked up in the rough.

The Indian girl sighed as she saw the white smoke curling up on the air from the mining-town; the presence of the pale and bearded invader was fatal to her race.

"Does my sister see the pale strangers yet?" asked the chief, who, leaning on his rifle, was standing so far back that he did not command an immediate view of the mountain side.

"No, Yuet-a can only see the smoke from the lodges of the bearded men," the girl replied.

And then, even as she spoke, from amid the low growth of oak and cedar came two men toiling up the mountain side.

"Yes, Yuet-a does see them now!" she exclaimed, and, as she spoke, she drew back so as not to be seen by the new-comers.

"Take my rifle and from behind the rock watch the pale strangers; they are snakes and may seek to bite the red chief. If their tongues are not forked they come to tell the braves of Shasta how to drive the white men from the valley."

"They have stopped amid the red snow!" the girl said.

"Good; it is there they will meet the chief."

CHAPTER II.

CINNABAR CITY.

A BRIGHT October day and a troop of bearded, red-shirted men advancing up the stream which was fed by the melting snows on Shasta's peak. Reckless were they that round them the Indian watch-fires burned on the summit of the hills, and the red braves, ten, twenty to one, like panthers, concealed within the wood, stood ready to spring upon them.

And then, when they camped at night beside the stream, the red McClouds, led by their great war-chief, Koo-chee (The Hog), came down upon them with the fury of the avalanche. A hundred red braves sprung from canyon and from hill-side—their intent, at a single charge, to drive the handful of whites into the river; but the prospecting miners were made of tough material. The repeating rifles with which they were armed did terrible execution, and in ten minutes' time the Indians, panic-stricken, were in full retreat.

Never again did the warriors of the McCloud venture upon an open attack, but they hung like wasps upon the flank of the whites, ready to dispatch any straggler who might stray from the main body.

At last the little party of whites came to where the foot-hills retreated on either side, forming a valley through the center of which ran the river.

For three miles or so within the valley the stream assumed a new character; before, it had been a turbulent torrent, rushing madly onward; but when it debouched from the small canyon at the head of the valley, it changed altogether and flowed peacefully along—the very ideal of a pastoral stream—over yellow sands.

Rough Bill Brown, one of the men of '49, a veteran miner, got just one look at the reach of yellow sand, extending half-across the river, as he came round the bend at the lower end of the valley, and up went his old slouch-hat in the air.

"Hi-yah, boys!" he yelled, "the promised land, for sure! That's the place to take out the 'pay dirt,' or I'm a sucker! Ain't that leetle bar jist fit fur an angel to squat on an' stake a claim, eh?"

And the chance appellation stuck to the reach of sand; Angel's Bar it was from that time forth.

It was about four in the afternoon when the party struck the valley, but pick and shovel, pan and spoon were soon in full play, and before the sun went down in his bed behind the far-distant peaks of the Coast Range, Brown announced that he "reckoned" the quartz from the cliff-side would "pan out" at the rate of from fourteen to twenty dollars a ton, and "mebbe" do better than that when they got fairly into the vein.

The "pan," too, reported good "pay dirt," both from the bar in the river and from the low foot-hills at the northern end of the valley.

"I calculate a man can rake in from four to ten dollars per day, and that ain't to be sneezed at," observed the "prospector," who had operated the pan.

And so, busy as bees, the little party went to work. Claims were staked off, cabins were built, and soon the smoke of the mining-camp ascending to heaven, told to the native red-man that another fair valley was lost to his race forever.

Brown and another one of the party, much to the astonishment of the rest, had laid claim to the quartz district, neglecting the easier worked "bar" and "placer" claims.

But the miners soon saw what the two were up to, when Dick Talbot, Brown's partner, started with a lot of the ore for San Francisco, with the in-

ention of there forming a joint-stock mining-company.

Talbot, active and go-ahead, succeeded in enlisting a company of capitalists in his enterprise. They dispatched an agent to examine the claim; he reported favorably, and the result was the forming of the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company, capital, \$50,000, divided into five hundred shares at \$100 each. One hundred shares were allotted to Talbot and Brown, in consideration of which they made over the claim to the company; and, in addition, they were engaged, respectively, as superintendent and foreman of the mine, at a salary of five dollars per day, and the company to find dwelling-places for them upon the claim.

The salary was put at a merely nominal figure, at Talbot's request. Both he and Brown were firm in their belief that they had a "lead" which would "beat the Marysville Quartz all hollow," in regard to gold per ton of ore, and they wished to let the capitalists see that it was no "salted" claim they had discovered.

In Californian mining parlance, to "salt" a claim is either to conceal rich pay dirt, and then dig it up, and pretend that it is virgin soil, or else to mingle first-class ore with the real product of the claim, and then submit it as a fair sample of the richness of the mine.

"The Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company built Cinnabar City; Angel's Bar became only a suburb. The company put up an eight-stamp mill, and built a canal from the head of the valley, diverting a portion of the water from its natural channel, to give power to work their machinery.

This proceeding took a good many hands; and as the report of the new "diggings" got abroad, settlers began to flock in.

In mining parlance, the Cinnabar diggings were "panning out" well. The folks on the "Bar" were making from eight to twelve dollars per day, with the "pan" and cradle alone, and four or five of them combined were putting up a "sluice" from which they expected great things.

After spending about thirty thousand for machinery, labor, etc., Superintendent Talbot let the water on in the canal, and the mill went to work, surrounded by the entire population of the "city" and vicinity. Even the diggings on the Bar were deserted; all had come to see machinery—representing brains—compete with manual labor.

About three tons of ore the stamps turned out, and then, with a smash—bang—part of the machinery gave way.

While Talbot and the machinist went to work to repair damages, Brown proceeded with his assistants to clean up the sluices and get at the gold.

Great was the excitement when he announced that the ore had yielded at the rate of forty dollars per ton; and as the cost of the extracting process might be roughly set down at ten dollars, the yield was therefore equal to a profit of about thirty dollars a ton if the quartz continued equally rich, as they continued to follow up the vein; and as the mill was equal to crushing eighteen to twenty tons in the twenty-four hours, being run night and day, it was plain that the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company had made a "big strike."

A company was formed on the spot, of rough, bearded, red-shirted, slouch-hatted men, who offered Messrs. Talbot and Brown \$20,000 for their one hundred shares in the mine, equal to an advance of a hundred per cent. above par.

But Brown and Talbot, both clear-headed, calm-nerved men, quietly said that they would like to hear some gentleman offer \$40,000, and then they would consider about it.

This new company couldn't raise the "blind," but immediately bought a claim near to the new mill, and prepared to go into the quartz crushing business on their own hook.

It took about a day to repair the mill, then she started again, run about an hour, and went to smash.

Nothing discouraged, Talbot and Brown went to work to repair her, while the gentlemen who were making ten dollars a day, with old-fashioned pans and "cradles," down at the Bar, emphatically declared that they didn't believe in them "blamed" mills "anyhow."

The machinery finally got to work, though, and went along for a month or so all right, but the ore didn't keep up to the standard of the first day; from forty dollars per ton it slowly but surely diminished to about fifteen; then in three months more, it got to twelve, and then to nine, and finally to six, a clear loss of four dollars per ton.

It was all right at head-quarters, at San Francisco, as long as the mine was running at a profit; but when it commenced to lose money, the president and directors began to growl, and to send special agents to see what the matter was; and then the more long-headed of the stockholders, believing that the mine was done for, quietly sold out their stock, and the result was, that Cinnabar Quartz Mining stock went down to about 75 from 190. And then the spring flood came, and swept away the upper end of the canal, which supplied the water to run the mill. Again work stopped. This was a heavy blow to Superintendent Talbot.

CHAPTER III.

A FRISCO "SHARP."

ON the north side of California street, about ten doors from where the Bank of California edifice now stands, was a small, three-story brick house, the upper part of which was chiefly devoted to lawyers' offices.

Just about two weeks after the canal of the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company broke, and shrewd observers had prophesied that the aforesaid gentleman would "go bust," a tall, slenderly-built gentleman, dressed entirely in black, and with considerable care, was proceeding slowly along California street. He was evidently in search of something, for he scrutinized the houses closely as he walked along, and paid particular attention to all the little tin lawyer-signs.

When he came to the modest three-story brick-house that we have mentioned, his eyes fell upon a very plain little sign, affixed to one side of the entry-way, and which bore the simple inscription, "Hosa Congleton," in plain Roman letters.

"That's my man!" the gentleman in black muttered; and as he hesitated for a moment to take a

look at the building before he entered it, we will improve the opportunity to describe him.

As we have said, he was tall and slender in build; an Italian face; high cheek-bones; shifting, dark-gray eyes, with ever and anon a greenish cast to them; pointed chin; hair jet-black, curly and worn rather long; the complexion pale; the eyebrows heavy, and two deep wrinkles between them; the teeth very white, and the lips very thin and bloodless. It was the face of a student, one who had spent vigils long, burning the midnight oil, and poring into the lore of sages long since returned to the dust from which they sprung. His hands, too, would go far as evidence to prove that he toiled with brains alone, for they were as white as the taper fingers of a school-girl—long and slender hands, exceedingly well taken care of, too, hands to be proud of, if the owner took pride in his personal appearance.

The face of this person was cleanly shaven and really showed little more traces of a beard than the face of a boy of fifteen.

Only one other peculiarity about the man worth mentioning, and that was a fashion he had of wearing his glossy silk hat tilted rakishly over his right eye.

If it had not been for this, he would have easily passed for a minister of the gospel, but the one failing betrayed to the man of the world, used to the tribe, that the pale-faced gentleman was indeed a student, but that it was cards and the mysteries of the "green-cloth" that he had studied, and his principal occupation in his silent hours was an endeavor to deal from the bottom of the pack without detection, or, in shuffling, to slip the top cut under the lower one before the eyes of witnesses, and yet do it so deftly that it would escape observation, and no snap of the cards coming together betray the "pass."

Andrew Jackson Hardin, late of the State of Kentucky, and commonly termed by his intimate friends "Kentuck"—the slender gentleman in black that we have just described—was about as skillful and unprincipled a "blackleg" as ever the State of California had the misfortune to harbor.

Happening to be in Yreka just about the time of the settlement of Cinnabar City, he was one of the first "sporting" gentlemen to visit it, and perceiving that the place was likely to amount to something, he had had a shanty built, and had started a faro bank.

A dead sure thing Kentuck had, whether the mines paid or not; he was bound to "corral" all the loose stamps floating around.

Entering the doorway, Hardin proceeded up the first flight of stairs. In the entry above, a small sign informed him that Mr. Congleton's office was No. 6, on the floor above.

Kentuck went at once to No. 6, and entered the room without any ceremony. There, seated by the window, perusing a newspaper, was a heavily-built man, forty-five or thereabout, with a broad, stolid face, the chin covered by a scanty beard, of a tawny hue, like in color to the short hair that grew up, brash and rough, from his head.

The man was heavy and coarse in appearance, both in figure, face and dress, except that the long, half-closed gray eyes that glistened beneath the protruding brows were keen and cunning.

Hosa Congleton was what might be termed a Western Yankee. Originally from Connecticut, he had emigrated to Ohio when quite a young man, then to Missouri, and finally to California. By profession he was a speculator, dabbled a little in mining stocks, and was looked upon by those who had business transactions with him as being a hard, sharp man, but not a particularly honorable one; he was reputed to be wealthy, and in stock operations he had been quite successful since operating in Frisco. To sum up his character in a word, a Californian would have termed him "a sharp."

Congleton looked up from his newspaper, glanced over the person of his visitor in some little astonishment, and waited to hear what he had to say.

"Mr. Congleton, I presume?" Kentuck observed, with extreme politeness, removing the glossy beaver from his carefully oiled locks.

"Yes, sir; that is my name."

"Permit me to give you my card," and Kentuck passed over the bit of pasteboard into the hand of the other.

"A. Jackson Hardin," said Congleton, half to himself, reading the inscription upon the card. "Sit down, sir," and he nodded to the only other chair in the room.

Kentuck accepted the invitation at once.

Congleton looked inquiringly at his visitor, as much as to ask him to explain his business.

"You deal a little in stocks, I believe, Mr. Congleton," Hardin said.

"Yes, sir, I do."

"I suppose you stand ready to buy any stock you see a chance to make money out of?"

"Yes, sir," Congleton was sparing of words; he wished his visitor to come to the point.

"By the way, Mr. Congleton, I forgot to mention it before: I'm from Cinnabar City, Siskiyou county," Kentuck said, abruptly.

"Ah, yes; I know the place; that is where the Cinnabar Company have their mine."

"Exactly; and, by the way, would you like to buy some shares of the Cinnabar Company's stock?"

"No, sir; don't want it!" exclaimed Congleton, abruptly. "I've got more of the Cinnabar stock on my hands now than I want."

"Is that possible?" and Kentuck pretended to be greatly surprised.

"Yes, sir; Cinnabar stock is a drug in this market."

"Perhaps you would like to sell the stock of the Cinnabar Company that you have on hand," Kentuck suggested.

Congleton shut up his left eye in a peculiar way he had when meditating deeply, and looked at the gentleman in black for a moment. He was just a little bit puzzled. Kentuck didn't look much like a stock-broker.

"Well," he said, after quite a little pause, "I suppose that I would be willing to sell at a fair offer."

"How many shares?"

"Ten."

"I'll give you two thousand dollars, payable in sixty days."

Again Congleton shut his left eye and stared at his visitor.

"May I ask how long it is since you left Cinnabar City?" he said, slowly.

"Just got in this morning—came straight from there."

"You rather astonish me," Congleton observed, thoughtfully; "if you come from Cinnabar City you must be posted in regard to the mine."

"I reckon I am," Kentuck replied, with perfect unconcern.

"You know that the canal is broken—that the stamps are not heavy enough to work the ore for a profit—that the blanket system is a mistake there, however well it may work in Grass Valley?"

"I know all about it, and I know that I can go into the open market and buy the shares that I offer you two hundred dollars apiece for for about sixty odd."

"Yes, the shares have dropped fifteen dollars since the last report. When the truth got out about the canal and the stamps, and that it would take about ten thousand dollars to start things again, it fell instantly. It's the directors now who are 'bulling' the market and keeping the price where it is. We have got the ten thousand dollars, but I have been appointed a special agent to visit the mine and report whether it will be worth while to put more money into it, or whether to let the thing drop."

"Sport, if you will go in with me, I'll show you the biggest operation that you ever heard of!" Kentuck exclaimed, suddenly, extending his thin, white hand and laying it on the speculator's knee.

CHAPTER IV.

VIRGIN GOLD.

STANDING a hundred feet or so from where the southern current of the Shasta had been diverted into the canal of the Cinnabar Company were the two prime movers in the enterprise—Richard Talbot, Superintendent, and William Brown—more generally termed Billy Brown—Foreman of the mine.

Five years have wrought but little change in Injun Dick's handsome features, and any one who had met him during his sojourn in the Spur City region as depicted in the pages of "Overland Kit," or among the hills and valleys near the Humboldt Bar, in the Wisdom river locality, as told in the story of "Rocky Mountain Rob," could not have failed to recognize the ex-road-agent and ex-man-hunter at the first glance. The only change perceptible in the man was that here and there amid his dark locks a stray gray hair might be detected, not so much a sign of years as of the terrible dangers through which he had passed.

Brown, his companion, was a yellow-bearded, yellow-haired, gray-eyed giant, with a face as round as the moon, as pleasant as a young girl's smile, and yet with a certain air of determination lurking in it, which plainly told of an iron will that no obstacle could turn from its way, and no danger could shake.

The workmen were busy at the canal, giving the finishing touches to the repairs.

A motley crew, the men with picks, axes, shovels! A Chinaman side by side with the graduate of the English Eton college, who, to use the phrase of his countrymen, was "down on his back," and seeking a new fortune far from his native land; a son of the Emerald Isle, fresh from his native bogs, and the absconding cashier of a New York bank; prison-birds and broken, honest men side by side.

"Now we're 'bout ready for work ag'in!" Brown exclaimed, slapping his partner heartily on the back.

"Yes, glad of it, too," Talbot answered, in a thoughtful sort of way; "but I tell you what, Brown, I'd give a dollar to know where we are going to get the money to pay the hands! There's about two thousand dollars due them, next Saturday."

"Don't you s'pose the directors in Frisco will pony up?"

"I'm a leetle doubtful," Talbot replied. "The special agent that they are going to send up to investigate the condition of things should get here within the next three days. If he is a sensible man he cannot help making such a report as will bring the money. In fact, from the letter of the president, I should infer that this agent is really invested with the power to pay the money right over if he is satisfied that everything is all right."

"Suppose that we shouldn't get the money?" Brown said.

"I reckon we'll have trouble, then," Talbot replied, tersely. "We've got some ugly customers among the hands."

"You're right, by hookey!" Brown exclaimed, "and, from what I heard, I think some of the galoots in the town are putting the hands up to be ugly."

Talbot's brows contracted just a little bit.

"They had better not try that," he said, quietly.

"You see, pard, the 'sharps' ain't over and above friendly to us, because we've done all we could to keep our men away from their places, and then this king-pin of the crowd, 'Kentuck,' as they call him, has got a grudge ag'in you."

So I understand, though I can't comprehend the reason for it."

"Dick, I'll spit it right out!" Brown exclaimed, bluntly; "if you should 'pass in your checks' suddenly, I reckon he'd try to marry your widdier."

Just a single flash of fire came from the eyes of Injun Dick, and then he spoke, quietly and calmly, as was usual with him:

"If the fellow knows what is good for him, he'll keep his eyes away from me and mine. But enough of that. It makes me angry when I think of the possibility that this reptile should dare to cast his eyes upon my wife."

"To change the subject," said Brown, abruptly, "suppose the company don't come down, and the men strike?"

"I have thought of that and have been devising means to meet the crisis."

"You won't give up the mine?"

"Not a give," replied Dick, tersely.

"Bully for you!" cried Brown, emphatically. "I'm with you, old man!"

Talbot consulted the little silver watch he wore.

"It's later than I thought," he said, in surprise. "I must be off. I've an appointment at noon. I'll be back before night."

Brown looked a little astonished as Talbot hurried away up the stream.

"Thunder! I wonder if he's on the same trail that I struck?" Brown exclaimed.

Walking with the long, springy stride peculiar to

him, and which covered a deal of ground, Talbot soon left the settlement behind and entered the canyon. At the upper end of the long, dark ravine an Indian trail struck off into the wilderness, leading apparently straight to the peak of the Shasta.

Talbot followed the trail for a half-hour or more, and then coming to a second path crossing the first, entered upon it, and in twenty minutes more was at the river's side again.

He was in a little valley hemmed in on all sides by the huge lava rocks and the forest wilderness, except where the stream entered and departed from it.

The Shasta was here only a mountain torrent, pools, rapids and shallow reaches, reflecting in its waters the images of the giant rocks that reared their heads aloft on every side.

Talbot cast a hasty glance around. It was evident that he expected some one, but his eyes fell only upon the sparkling waters and the lava rocks, fringed with pine, cedar, and juniper, while, a few miles to the south-east, great Mount Shasta, like a guardian genius, surveyed the scene.

"I am too soon or else I have been tricked," Talbot muttered, consulting his watch, which marked the time as being five minutes after twelve. Then he cast a wary glance around and examined the revolvers which were strapped to his waist under his coat. He had little dread of danger, though, for the Indian had learned to hold the bearded white man in dread, and rarely attempted an attack except by night and in overwhelming numbers. Their savage weapons were weak indeed against the fire-arms of the invader.

No sign or sound that denoted danger could Talbot see or hear.

"I'll wait," he muttered, as he seated himself upon a projecting rock: "something may have occurred to detain my friend."

Scarcely were the words uttered, when bounding down the rocks at the upper end of the little valley, came a light, graceful form, clad in the costume of an Indian boy, in years apparently not over twelve; very light in complexion, although the hideous black and yellow paint which disfigured the face almost concealed that fact.

So light were the footsteps of the Indian and so quick the motion, that a squirrel descending this lava stairway of nature could not have been more noiseless.

Talbot rose to receive the Indian.

"My brother is late," he said, speaking in the Indian tongue in which he was well versed, from long acquaintanceship with the mountain red-men, and surveying the face of the youth with considerable curiosity.

"Wallae come when the sun is highest—it is full high now—then go straight behind the rocks, there," and the Indian pointed to the distant peaks of the coast range.

Talbot comprehended that possibly his watch was fast.

"My brother's name is Wallae?"

"Yes, Wallae—friend, in Shasta language."

"And you will be a friend to the white man?"

The Indian bowed his head gravely.

"Is my little brother on the war-path that he paints his face?" Talbot asked.

"No war-path," responded the youth, evidently confused; then he thrust his hand into the embroidered pocket that hung by his side and produced a lump of virgin gold, five ounces at least in weight. "See, me know where plenty gold live."

Talbot examined the gold in astonishment. The mountain "pocket" from which it had come must be a rich one.

"And you will show me where you procured this lump of gold?" Talbot asked.

"Maybe," replied the Indian, evasively.

"It is in the Indian country?"

"Yes, two only of the Shasta tribe know where, the chief, Hee-ma-Nang-a—"

"And yourself?"

"Yes, for the blood of the Sun-King is in my heart," the Indian said, proudly, pointing aloft to the sun.

"You are the son of the chief?" Talbot asked, but before the Indian could answer the question, the shrill hoot of the great horned owl resounded on the air. Talbot grasped his revolvers; he guessed the meaning of the sound only too well, for, at the signal, each cresting rock bore an Indian warrior, and high over the rest, on a lava throne, stood Koo-chue (the Hog), the great chief of the McClouds and the deadly enemy of the white settlers of Cinnabar.

CHAPTER V.

"BEARING" THE MARKET.

HOSA CONGLETON indulged in a good, long look at his visitor, but, if studying Kentuck's face to discover aught there, he might as well have stared at the wall.

"Suppose you explain what the operation is?" the speculator suggested, "and then I can talk to you."

"You want to understand the little game, eh?"

Congleton nodded.

"That's square!" Kentuck exclaimed; "now just keep your eyes open and I'll show you the biggest chance for a big strike there is this day on the Pacific slope. You are posted about the Cinnabar Company—who holds the stock, etc."

"Yes, as well posted as any man in town."

"Let me see! there's about five hundred shares, worth at par a hundred dollars apiece, isn't there?"

"Exactly five hundred."

"Suppose two or three hundred should be forced on the market with orders to realize at any price, what would be the effect?"

"Knock the stock way down to almost nothing; the directors are holding it at sixty now, and if any stray shares come into the market they pick 'em up at that price."

"And if you go up and find things are bad, you will probably try and realize on the ten shares of stock that you hold, before the fact gets out?"

"That is possible," Congleton said, cautiously.

"To come right down to the point, you fellows that are bolstering the stock up will get right out if you find that the mine is played."

"Now, really, you must see that it is not possible for me to answer such a question!" Congleton exclaimed, a little astonished that his visitor should possess such an intimate knowledge of the ideas of the president and directors of the company.

"Well, sport, you needn't go to Cinnabar City!" Kentuck said, in his peculiar, abrupt way. "The mine is all hunky. I ought to know. I run the Occidental saloon there, and I reckon I'm posted. I ain't no miner myself, and couldn't tell 'pay dirt' from the 'bed-rock,' but I know a cuss that can break the bank in that line, every time, and what he knows I know. The thing is all right. If the company forks over the ten thousand dollars it will run, in fact, I reckon it will run anyway. Here's two thousand dollars—Wells, Fargo & Co.'s receipt for the dust; so jes' transfer the ten shares over and I'll git." Kentuck held the receipt in his thin, white fingers and flourished it before the eyes of the speculator.

Congleton, though, seemed in no hurry to deliver the shares. He regarded Kentuck attentively for a moment, his eyes half-closed as usual.

"See here, my friend!" he exclaimed, suddenly, "if the shares are worth two hundred apiece to you, why they must be worth that to me, so I guess I won't sell; but what is your game anyway offering three times what you can buy the shares for, in the open market?"

"Because in sixty days they'll be worth two hundred; that's only my opinion, of course, but I back it up with two thousand dollars in dust; a man can't talk plainer than when he backs his words with the solid stuff."

"Yes; but why do you come and tell me this?" Congleton asked; "why don't you go into the market and pick your shares at the market price?"

"Because I'm after a bigger strike than to make a few hundred dollars on shares," Kentuck replied, coolly. "I propose to go into partnership with you, and to buy out the stockholders of the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company."

The speculator took a good, long look at the cool-headed individual who so carelessly proposed to assume the responsibility of a great mining company.

"Have you any idea how much it would cost to carry out the little scheme you speak of?" Congleton asked.

"Let me see! five hundred shares at sixty each would come to about thirty thousand dollars," replied Kentuck, taking a pencil from his pocket and figuring out the sum on the back end of an envelope.

"A leetle more than that," said Congleton, "for, as you commenced to absorb the shares, naturally you would produce a demand for them, and then people would begin to inquire who was buying them up, and then they would investigate the condition, present and prospective, of the mine, and if the thing looked well the shares would go up."

"If they get the ten thousand dollars up at Cinnabar, the mine, with the new machinery, will work the ore they have on hand at a profit of about a dollar a ton."

"How can that be?" demanded Congleton; "the last ore only produced about six dollars worth of gold to the ton, and the expense of raising and milling were at least ten dollars per ton."

"They had about used that ore up when the mill broke; and the fresh ore will pan out ten to eleven dollars per ton. You see, sport, I had a leetle curiosity on the subject, so I had a galoot lift some of the ore one dark night, and try it; and with the new machinery, maybe, it will do better than that."

"But even that product will not send the stock up to two hundred."

"Well, I'm betting two thousand dollars that in less than a month the mill will be working ore almost as rich as when she first started. They've struck a big 'lead' in the tunnel, but they haven't commenced to work it yet. You see, sport, I had that ore sampled, too."

Congleton began to realize that he had got hold of a cool hand.

"If what you say be true, it seems to me that the moment this gets out, the Cinnabar stock won't be for sale at all," the speculator remarked.

"That's so," Hardin ejaculated; "and, rocks, you couldn't buy the hundred shares that Talbot and Brown hold at any price; they believe in the mine, and will spend their last cent before they throw up their cards."

"How can we buy up the shares, then, supposing I thought favorably of your partnership idea?"

"We must play a bluff game," said Kentuck; "you must go up to Cinnabar, examine the mine, and report that you think the ten thousand will fix things all right. The company planks down the ducats, the machinery goes in—goes to work ag'in and breaks. You call upon the company for five or ten thousand more; it's a hundred to one that they won't 'ante' up, then down goes the stock to nothing; we quietly corral it all, start the mill again, and make the biggest strike ever known in the north. I reckon instead of paying sixty for the stock, we can get it for about twenty, or perhaps less."

Congleton reflected for a moment.

"I think it would be wise not to put the new machinery in, because we might not be able to arrange the break all right. The idea is to get the ten thousand dollars, buy the machinery, but not to put it in. Can we fix matters with this Talbot, the superintendent of the works?"

"Nary fix, I reckon," replied Kaintuck, tersely. "He and Brown have got to be got out, some way."

"We might buy their shares."

"They won't sell, sport; the fact is, we have got to bust the concern all up, and run those two men out before we can make the strike. I reckon I can attend to that. I owe this Talbot a leetle grudge, and maybe I wouldn't have thought of this ten-strike if I hadn't been planning how to get square with him."

"The scheme does look plausible," the speculator said, thoughtfully. "The mine is in pretty bad odor, now. There have been so many wild-cat concerns up in that region, that the capitalists are afraid of all of them. If there should be any more trouble in regard to the mine, the men who are now keeping the credit of the company up would be apt to try to get out at almost any sacrifice."

"Then our game is just as plain as can be!" Kentuck exclaimed. "Get the ten thousand dollars locked up in new machinery, then start the mill, and contrive to bust 'em ag'in. Jest as soon as the news that she's stopped working reaches Frisco, fling your shares and mine on the market; I own ten, and with your ten, that makes twenty. Give out that you're disgusted, and quit the game. Even twenty shares, right on the heels of the bad news, forced to

a sale, will be apt to break the price; and if some fifty-share feller gets frightened and looses his grip, we're hunky to buy in at our own price."

"I'll take a look at the mine, and then I'll give you an answer," Congleton said.

"Rocks! you'll go in with me; it's a hundred to one!" Kentuck said.

CHAPTER VI.

KOO-CHUE, THE HOG.

A STRANGE and startling tableau that picture in the little valley of the Shasta.

Thirty Indian warriors perched like statues upon the lava-crag, gayly decked with the war-paint and fully armed with the weapons of their race, and some few of them with the death-dealing fire-arms of the white man.

Talbot, the cocked revolver in his hand, ready to sell his life dearly, and the young Indian, weaponless, yet fearlessly upright, facing the great McCloud chief as though he came with the green boughs of peace, rather than with the shout of war and the weapons of destruction.

And the great chieftain of the warlike McClouds, too, a monarch with the lion's mien, claiming descent from the sun-god, ruler of the western world, whose everlasting flame had burned for aye upon the altar reared of quartz and gold to mighty Tonatin. The rifle of the bearded pale-face the chieftain held within his hand; the leopard-skin fell from his broad shoulders, massive ornaments of red gold adorned his wrists, and the claws of a grizzly bear, the Sierra's lord, were strung in a necklace around his finely-chiseled throat.

A single glance Talbot gave, and at once perceived that there was no immediate danger.

Not a red savage of the McClouds was within rifle-range, except the chief, and he bore his weapon calmly in his hand, the hammer down.

"It is the red McClouds!" exclaimed the young Indian.

"Friends of yours?" asked Talbot, suspiciously.

"The blood of the Shasta tribe is in the heart of Wallae," replied the youth, proudly; "the Shastas were chiefs when the McClouds groveled in the dust as slaves. Long time ago, in the red plains of the south, the McClouds burned in the sun, while the Shastas lived in the shade, so the Shasta people are yellow like gold, and the McClouds red as the copper. No friendship between the chief and the slave."

Talbot was fully satisfied that the boy spoke the truth, although his first thought was that he had been cunningly lured into the hands of the Indians.

"Is not yonder warrior the head chief of the McClouds?" he asked.

"Yes, Koo-chue, the Hog," the Indian replied—his face expressing the contempt he felt for the McCloud chief.

Talbot thought that he recognized the warrior, although he had never seen him except in the heat of battle. He understood at once that he was in a position of great peril; for what could one do against a host, even with the advantage of weapons?

And as Talbot was vainly striving to devise some plan to escape from the danger that surrounded him, the McCloud chief, high up on the lava-rock, suddenly waved his hand, and, at the signal, each Indian brave instantly vanished from sight. Talbot could hardly believe his eyes; one moment a score and more of the red-skinned foes, crowning each point of vantage, weapons in their hands, and the instinct of blood strong in their faces, and then, nothing but the naked lava-rocks, the one chief, and the nodding tops of the pine, cedar and juniper!

But that the McCloud chief still kept his position, the cool and hardy superintendent of the Cinnabar Company would almost have believed that he had been dreaming while awake.

The stern chief of the McClouds though, with his iron-like face, massive limbs, and warrior bearing, was visible proof that danger still threatened the white man.

When the eyes of Talbot again turned toward the chief, after noting the disappearance of his warriors, Koo-chue beckoned to the white, as if inviting him to a conference. The Indian cast down the rifle upon the rock, drew the long, glittering scalping-knife from his belt of untanned leather, and the tomahawk from its resting-place beside it, and placed them upon the flinty stone to bear the rifle company.

Then down from his crested peak, unarmed, he came; he plucked a branch of the juniper and bore it along in his strong right hand as a signal that he came on a peaceful quest.

"The chief would speak," the Indian boy said.

"I fear some treachery," Talbot observed, doubtfully.

"Fear not; Koo-chue would not break the sign of peace even to slay his deadliest foe. Not a brave in his band but would despise the act." Firmly and decidedly the Indian spoke, and his tone carried conviction with it.

The McCloud chief advanced until he came within a hundred feet of where Talbot and the Indian boy stood, and then he paused, extended his arms as if to indicate his defenseless condition, then waited for the white to advance.

Talbot, distrustful, hesitated at first to leave his weapons in charge of the Indian boy; a dim suspicion was in his mind that, perhaps all this was but a ruse to deprive him of his weapons, and so take his life without a struggle; but a glance into the face of the youth and he dismissed the thought as unworthy of belief. Then the idea occurred to him that, while he advanced to meet the chief, some of his followers, snake-like, might manage under cover of the rocks to advance near enough to capture the weapons by a sudden dash. He resolved not to trust to the honor of the Indian. Clinking the hammers of the revolvers down, he thrust them back into their holsters beneath the skirts of his coat, and, extending his arm in imitation of the manner of the savage, he advanced to meet him.

Koo-chue, with a frowning brow, noticed that the white man did not lay aside his weapons, but he manifested no fear, and kept his position.

Talbot came within six feet of the chief, and there he halted.

Curiously each surveyed the other.

The McCloud chief was the first to speak.

"The pale chief does not trust to the honor of

the red-man," he said, an expression of contempt apparent upon his dusky features. "The McCloud chief comes weaponless to talk to his white brother."

"You seek the conference, not I," Talbot replied. "You are surrounded by your warriors; I am alone, and upon your ground."

"Does the white chief acknowledge that the Indians own anything?" asked the warrior, scornfully, "or is it because the valley is so rough that the pale-face cannot scratch in the earth like a rabbit?"

"Is this what you wanted to say to me?" Talbot questioned, in his cool way, "because it seems to me, that if it is, you have taken a great deal of trouble for nothing."

"The chief will speak now," the Indian replied, shortly. "The white man is alone, far from his people; what is his life worth surrounded by the warriors of the McCloud?"

"That's a conundrum, chief," Talbot replied, and both his words and the smile upon his lips puzzled the Indian.

"The red-man cannot understand his white brother—can he not answer the question?"

"Well, I'll try," Dick said, in his quiet way. "In the valley, in a fair fight, my life is worth at least twelve McCloud braves, and if I succeed in breaking through the line and reach the cover of the timber, I reckon it's worth thirty lives at least."

"My brother talks big, but words do not all," the Indian remarked, shrewdly; "the rifle of the chief will send a ball through the heart of the white man before he can fire his little gun twice."

"The only way to settle it is to find out; so step back, chief, and raise the war-cry for the fight to commence!"

Talbot had been in and escaped from too many dangers to be frightened by words, and he knew full well, too, that the Indian chief had desired to speak with him for some other purpose than mere bravado.

"The warriors of the McCloud will not take the life of the white chief, if he will do as he is bid," the chief said, lowering his voice almost to a whisper.

"What must I do?" Talbot demanded, astonished at the speech.

"Go straight from the valley to the smoke of your own lodges."

Suddenly, Talbot thought he comprehended the Indian's scheme.

"And the Indian boy?"

"No boy—girl!" responded the warrior, laconically.

Talbot was not prepared for this information.

"Are you not wrong? His name is Wallace—Friend, in the Indian language."

"Yes, Wallace—Her, too, in Shasta tongue."

"And it is a girl?"

"Yuet-a—Moon, the flower of the Shastas!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT.

TALBOT was decidedly astonished at this information, for he was well aware that the Indians of the Shasta race were fully as hostile to the whites as any of the northern tribes, and yet a daughter of that race had sought him with intent to reveal the treasure-house of nature where the golden grains were stored. Keen-sighted, quick-witted Injun Dick was puzzled. He could assign no reason for the girl's conduct.

"Does my white brother believe the McCloud chief?" the warrior asked.

"Why should you deceive me?" Talbot replied, evasively.

"Koo-chue does not lie when the truth will do as well," the savage said, a candid confession which rather surprised Talbot, who had been used to dealing with the Indians east of the Sierra Nevada chain, an entirely different race from the tribes of California, descendants of the ancient Mexicans, the followers of Montezuma.

"Yuet-a is the sister of the great chief of the Shasta tribe, Hee-ma-Nang-a," continued the warrior; "she is the sunlight of the North. Koo-chue is a big brave; once the McClouds feared to tread in the hunting-grounds of the Shastas and the Tonatons, and the Sacramentos—on the north, the first two; on the south, the last—between the two the warriors of the McCloud were ground to pieces like corn between the stones in the hands of a squaw. Now, the Sacramentos mount their mustangs and fly like the wind when Koo-chue leads the McClouds with the spring-waters down the river to the big valley, and the warriors of the north run like the bears to their caves when the war-cry of the favored sons of Ytzaqual rises on the mountain side. Koo-chue would kill the bearded warrior but fears that Yuet-a may be harmed."

"In short, you spare me that you may obtain the girl."

"My brother speaks wisely," the chief replied.

"And if I refuse the offer?"

"My bearded brother will not refuse, for life is sweet even to the reptile that crawls on the earth," the wily Indian answered.

"But if I do?" persisted Talbot.

"Then my brother will never see the white smoke of his lodges again. His bones will whiten here by the side of the river, and his scalp will dry and blacken in the tepee of a McCloud warrior!" the chief exclaimed, proudly, his eyes flashing and chest swelling.

"First the McClouds must win the scalp, and before it is won, many a brave will need to have the death-song sung, to smooth his passage to the happy hunting-grounds."

Just a single instant the savage looked into the eyes of the white, but in that instant he read the answer to his offer.

"My brother refuses?"

"Yes."

"The Shastas are not my brother's friends; why should he concern himself in a matter that is nothing to him?" the Indian very naturally asked.

"That is my affair," Talbot replied, shortly. "You have my answer, chief. Either the girl goes free with me, or else, single-handed, I'll fight your warriors. Remember, too, if I fall by the hands of the McClouds, my comrades down the river will most terribly avenge my death."

"Some day the McClouds will kill all the white

men together," replied the chief, loftily; then he turned upon his heel and strode away.

Talbot returned at once to the Indian girl. Motionless as one of the boulders she had remained, while the conference had been in progress between the white and the savage.

When Talbot reached the side of the girl he cast a hasty glance around. No sign of a foe could he see, excepting the tall figure of the McCloud chief ascending the defile.

"The chief tells me that you are Yuet-a, a daughter of the Shasta tribe," Talbot said.

"It is true."

"Why did you deceive me by assuming to be a boy?"

"The white chief would not have listened to the words of a girl nor followed her counsel," she replied.

"The McCloud chief has offered to let me go free—"

"And leave Yuet-a a prisoner in the hands of the man she hates!" the Indian girl exclaimed with vehemence.

"You dislike the chief?"

"The child of the eagle mates not with the hawk," she answered, disdainfully.

"And the chieftain would make you his squaw?"

The girl did not reply, but the look of disgust upon her face convinced Talbot that he had guessed rightly.

"Well, we must fight them, for I have refused to go without you," and as he spoke, Talbot drew one of the revolvers from its holster.

With a calm face, but beaming eyes, the girl looked upon him, as he glanced around to note the positions of the foe.

Not a living thing was in sight, and yet Talbot knew that the warriors of the red McCloud were lurking near, concealed behind the lava rocks, and that at each moment he might expect to hear the whiz of arrows flying through the air, or the sharp crack of the more deadly fire-arm.

"You are familiar with the valley; what course shall we take to escape this trap?" Talbot asked.

"We cannot remain here, for the red braves are certainly closing in upon us, taking advantage of the concealment afforded by the rocks. The moment they are within range they will fire."

"We must go down the valley," the girl answered, rapidly. "If we can gain the canyon at the lower end, we shall be safe, for within the defile one man can beat off a hundred."

A hurried glance Talbot took at the locality indicated by the girl. 'Twas five hundred yards or so from the spot on which the two stood to where the canyon reared its dark walls three hundred feet or more straight to the sky, hemming in the river to a little narrow passage scarce fifty feet in width.

Half-way between the little open space whereon Talbot and the Indian girl stood and the entrance to the dark canyon was a rocky ledge, four or five feet high, and as regularly formed as though built by a mason's cunning hand. Behind the ledge some of the Indians had been concealed; how many, Talbot could not remember, but four or five at the least, he was certain. The ground from where he stood to the wall of the rock was tolerably clear, but beyond the ledge it was broken up by rocky spurs.

Talbot's quick wits had conceived a plan of action.

"We must make a dash to gain the mouth of the canyon!" he exclaimed, hurriedly drawing the other revolver from his belt as he spoke, and cocking it. "The sudden advance will undoubtedly surprise the Indians; and there is a chance that we may escape their arrows. They'll not stand quiet and fire at us once I am within revolver range. Follow close on my heels. Now!"

And then, at his topmost speed, a cocked revolver in each hand, Talbot ran down by the side of the river, heading straight for the ledge of rocks—straight for the mouth of the canyon, while the Indian girl followed close behind.

Before Dick had taken six steps, up from their places of concealment sprang the warriors of the McCloud, all in amazement at the unexpected action.

Five warriors manned the rocky wall, right between the fugitives and the canyon's mouth. Wildly they discharged their arrows as Talbot and the girl came on; but their missiles fell harmlessly upon the earth, the range short a hundred yards at least.

Then the angry tones of Koo-chue, the McCloud chief, came pealing on the clear mountain air, ringing out a command to charge upon the fugitives.

The braves on the flanks and rear obeyed instantly, but the five in front hesitated to abandon their rocky rampart, and cast, too, anxious glances to the right and left, as if calculating the chances of escaping, if they failed to stop the desperate charge of the white foe.

Another flight of arrows, this time the flint-heads tearing up the earth even at Talbot's feet. And then the revolvers spoke, for Dick was within range, and the Indians were half uncovered, reckless in their excitement.

Four shots and two warriors down, the other three in a panic-stricken retreat for the shelter of the hill-side.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO THE DEATH.

A NARROW space between the gray stone walls that upreared their heads to heaven on either side of the Shasta stream; a canyon so dark and deep that neither the piercing beams of the midday sun nor the trembling light of the midnight stars ever penetrated the gloom that had rested for ages on the bosom of the river; a gloomy recess, like to a charnel vault or the prison-home of a lost soul, condemned forever to linger on the precincts of the tomb.

But the shelter of the dark canyon was to Injun Dick more welcome than would have been the portals of an earthly paradise, for it promised safety from the fierce warriors of the red McCloud.

Just at the entrance of the canyon the river took a sudden leap down five feet or so, as if in haste to be gathered in the embrace of the frowning cliffs.

Standing ankle-deep in the water, behind the natural breast-work formed by the rocks, over which the river splashed with a dull and sullen sound, Talbot and the Indian girl watched for the approach of the foe.

Weapon in hand, cool and collected, the white man gazed with an earnest glance upon the stream

and over the open space, where, but a moment before, in nature's amphitheater, the lords of the wilderness and the pioneer of civilization had met in a deadly strife.

No trace of a hostile foe could Talbot see as warily his keen eyes ranged from rock to rock, and from tree to tree; and yet he knew that a score or more of painted warriors, with hearts swelling with rage, to avenge the fate of their fallen comrades, stricken down by the deadly fire-hail of their bearded foe, were lurking close at hand.

The gentle breeze, blowing fresh from great Shasta's top, stirred the stiff foliage of the cedars, and kissed with a soft and loving touch the leaves of the juniper—just as if nature, with her calm and smiling face, sought to rebuke the creatures who were so eager for blood and massacre.

Boulder and beetling cliff, cedar and juniper, sky and river, but no trace of the living red McClouds visible to the eyes of the hunted gold-seeker, who waited so patiently, revolver in hand, and finger on trigger, for the foe to begin a fresh attack. The dead braves lay on the rocks just as they had fallen in death's terrible agonies. One huge warrior, all huddled up in a heap, his head bent down between his knees, as though he was but resting, and soon might rise and walk again. The other stretched at full length upon the lava rocks, his face downward, shot as he had turned to flee, his mouth stained with gory dust, and a fragment of the rock clutched within his massive hand, grasped wildly in the parting convulsions of nature ere life's spark fled.

"Not one of them in sight!" Talbot muttered, when five minutes or more had elapsed and no indications of the Indians had been given. "Is it possible that they have abandoned their project?"

The Indian girl, placing her hand on Talbot's shoulder, pointed to the dead warriors in the open space.

Talbot was not slow to guess the meaning of the motion.

"The McClouds would not leave their dead men, eh?"

"The white chief has spoken straight," replied the girl. "If it costs the lives of half his warriors, Koo-chue would not leave his dead brothers to be scalped by the pale-face."

"It will cost five lives at least, I reckon," Talbot observed, grimly, as he noted the position of the two braves and saw how open was the neighborhood of the ground whereon they lay. "I wonder what the red fiends are up to?" he continued, musingly. "I fear that this silence means mischief. Is it possible for a party to get round the canyon and attack us in the rear?"

The girl shook her head.

"It is many steps to the end, and the rocks are high, and the thicket so dense that a snake alone may pass. Koo-chue and his braves will creep toward us as the fox crawls through the bushes upon a rabbit."

Talbot had been glancing about him, noting the lay of the ground; his eyes resting finally upon the tall sides of the ravine, a thought occurred to him.

"Is there any path by means of which the Indians can gain the tops of the rocks and from the high fire down upon us?" he asked.

"No path, but over the rocks and through the bushes, the way of the mountain sheep."

"But it is possible for the warriors to get to the summit?"

"Yes, but not to harm us from there!" exclaimed the girl, quickly. "The distance is too great, and the eye of the eagle alone can penetrate the darkness of the canyon."

Satisfied at this answer, Talbot again devoted his entire attention to the open space before him. Quickly his keen eyes scanned the probable points of the foe's approach. But watch as carefully as he might, no hostile sign could he detect.

And then, just as he was beginning to come to the conclusion that, contrary to savage custom from time immemorial, the McClouds had abandoned their slain brothers and had retreated from the field, the Indian girl clutched him violently by the arm and pulled him toward her. Not a moment too soon was the action, for an arrow, barbed with flint and hurled with a most dextrous aim, came whizzing through the air within a foot of Talbot's head. Had he kept his former position it would have pierced his heart. The prompt action of the Indian girl had surely saved his life.

Almost before the hard flint of the arrow-head quivered against the rock ledge in the bed of the stream, Talbot's quick eyes had detected from whence the shot had come.

High up on the side of the hill, only a hundred yards or so from the natural redoubt occupied by the fugitives, was a clump of juniper, hardly large enough apparently to give shelter to a carrion crow, and yet a slender and agile brave of the red McClouds had, snake-like, wormed a passage along the hill-side unobserved, and gained a sheltered position behind the little clump of bushes and the uprising rocks of the narrow ledge.

Above the ledge whereon the savage had secured an ambush the rocky wall rose, curving upward thirty feet at least; below it the ledge dipped abruptly down to the bed of the stream, over which the bushes hung.

The Indian, lying at full length behind the shelving wall, peering through the leaves of the juniper, was almost as well protected from Talbot's fire as if his gayly-painted body had been incased in iron.

Talbot, raising his revolver, took deliberate aim at the projecting rock right above the savage and fired.

It was the carom of the billiard table over again, for the ball, rebounding from the rock, tore its way through the skin of the red-skin, inflicting, though, but a slight flesh wound, for the force of the ball was spent.

But Talbot's object was gained, for the savage, with a howl of rage, half uprose, as if to discover by what miraculous means the white man had managed to wound him in the rear while firing at his front.

Talbot was not slow to improve the opportunity. Again the sharp crack of the revolver rung out upon the air. A moan of pain from the stricken McCloud warrior answered the report.

The ball had entered the naked breast of the warrior, just under the left arm, as he had turned upon his side to gaze at the rock above him.

A mortal wound, but one not instantly fatal.

With a yell of defiance, the chieftain fitted an arrow to his bow, and, drawing it to the head, essayed to hurl the flint-headed missile upon the daring pale-face below.

The barbed head quivered for an instant against the sinew of deer with which the bow was strung, then, with a low moan, the nervous arms of the savage relaxed, the arrow sped into empty space, and the warrior slid from the rocky ledge. A last dying clutch he made at the juniper bush; the feeble branch parted under the weight, and then, with a heavy thud, the agile chieftain of the red McClouds came down lifeless upon the lava rocks.

A howl of rage came from a score of throats when the light-limbed McCloud warrior came tumbling down the cliff-side, struggling in the agonies of death.

Rising from their hiding-places amid the rocks, and from behind the friendly shelter of the cedar and the juniper, the red chiefs discharged a flight of arrows in the direction of the victorious white man.

It was but an empty threat, for not a missile came within a hundred feet of the canyon's mouth.

"They'll not be apt to send a second brave along that rock-ledge," Talbot muttered, grimly, as he removed the discharged shells from the cylinder of his revolver and shoved fresh cartridges in their places.

"The white chief is a great warrior!" exclaimed the Indian girl in great admiration.

Talbot smiled, not so much at the girl's words, as at the manner in which she uttered them.

Again the little valley resumed its normal stillness. The red warriors had retaken their former position, and to the eyes of a stranger, Talbot would have seemed to be keeping guard only against rocks and trees.

But Injun Dick, well acquainted with the wily arts of the savages, knew that the fierce warriors of the McCloud still hemmed him in, thirsting for his blood.

"I don't know but what it would be as well to make a dash down the canyon," Talbot murmured, doubtfully, with a sideways glance at the dark passage behind him.

"The chief should not fly," the girl said, with a proud accent. "Like the great white bear he should stand and fight till his teeth are drawn and his nails are cut."

"Even the bear may retreat without disgrace if twenty mountain lions surround him," Talbot said. And as he spoke he was gazing curiously into the proud and handsome face of the Shasta queen.

"The chief can kill the McClouds, one by one—they are not lions, but wolves, that can only howl and snap," the girl replied, contemptuously.

"And is that the reason why you will not listen to the suit of the McCloud chief?"

"Yuet-a is the queen of the Shastas; she cannot be the squaw of a chief who is red as the copper ore; she is of the golden race."

"Perhaps you favor a chief of your own tribe?" Talbot remarked, carelessly.

"No," replied the Indian girl, promptly. "Yuet-a looks higher still."

"Indeed!" Talbot exclaimed, rather astonished at the strange declaration, "and what red warrior do you consider to be either better or braver than the men of your tribe?"

"No red brave—white!" the girl answered, laconically.

"Oh, I understand," and as he spoke, Talbot wondered that he had not guessed the girl's meaning before.

"The bearded men are no braver than the warriors of the Shasta tribe, but they are as cunning as the beaver. The red-men cannot stand against them. Once the altar fires to great Yopitone burnt on the rocks where the big water dashes on the shore. Many moons ago the white men came, and now their lodges stand where once the sacred fire leaped and played. Now the white comes up the valley of the Shasta. Does he not seek the yellow metal which he calls gold?"

Talbot nodded assent. Astonished as he was by the words of the girl, he still kept a wary eye upon the movements of the foe while continuing the conversation.

"Yuet-a knows a 'sink' in the mountains where the white man can walk on the yellow metal."

Talbot's eyes glistened at the very thoughts of such a "find;" even in his present dangerous position there was a subtle charm in the idea of picking up virgin gold in solid nuggets.

"And from that place you procured the specimens that you gave me just before the McClouds attacked us?"

"Yes."

"Why did you seek the interview with me?" Talbot asked, suddenly; "why did you wish to reveal to me the existence of this wonderful mine?"

"Is not the pale-face the great chief of the lodges down the river?"

"Yes, I am one of the principal men there."

"And you come to the valley of the Shasta after the yellow metal?"

"That is our main quest."

"And if you had plenty, you would go away?"

Talbot could not forbear smiling at the eager manner in which the Indian asked the question.

"That is doubtful," he said; "it would take a great deal of gold to satisfy the settlers in Cinnabar City. I am afraid that the more they got, the more they would want."

"Yuet-a cannot lie!" exclaimed the girl, suddenly; "she will talk straight to the pale chief. She is a queen among her people, and when she speaks she does not speak like the daughter of a common chief. Yuet-a knows that her tribe cannot fight the white men alone, and the Shastas cannot unite with the McClouds. The red warriors must fight the white men in the white man's way. Yuet-a has watched the lodges of the whites from the trees of the hill-side, and she has learned to like their chief. She will give him yellow metal enough to fill one of his lodges; he shall give his brothers what they want and tell them to go away; then he can come to the Shastas and ask for their queen to come and sing in his lodge, and she will be so proud of the great white chief that she will not say him nay, but will make him the lord of all the Sha-ta valley."

With an earnest, sober face the Indian girl delivered her speech. It was the welfare of her people

that she sought, and it was the queenly blood within her veins which told her that for their sake she might cast aside her maiden modesty and speak her thoughts freely to the man she fancied.

Talbot was considerably astonished. At first he felt inclined to smile at the proposal, but a glance into the open, innocent face of the Indian girl revealed to him how thoroughly in earnest she was in the matter, and when he came to consider the subject, he was fain to confess that the untutored child of Nature—the feathered, garnished queen of the Shasta tribe—had really hit upon a capital idea if she could only succeed in carrying it out. Divide and conquer, the old device; old since the world was young.

"Suppose that the white men in the valley refuse to go?" Talbot suggested.

"Then the pale king of the red-men can teach his warriors how to fight with the fire-guns and drive the strangers away," replied the girl, spiritedly.

It was evident that she had fully calculated the chances that might arise from the situation.

"You have spoken frankly," Talbot observed, after a moment's thought, "and I will be as frank with you. In the white lodges down the river I have a squaw, so what you speak of cannot be."

The Indian girl hung her head sadly; the bright vision she had cherished had suddenly vanished.

Then upon the air pealed the fierce war-cry of the McClouds.

Talbot waited anxiously for the attack, but after a minute or so became convinced that the yell was mere bravado.

"The moment the gloom of the night comes, we can easily escape down the canyon," he said, cheerfully.

As the words passed his lips, the girl started suddenly from her abstraction and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Listen!" she cried; "there are steps coming up the canyon."

"Surrounded front and rear," muttered Talbot; "but I'm not dead yet!"

And while with bated breath the two watched and waited for the foe in the rear to approach, high up over their heads a terrible danger impended.

The wily chieftain of the McClouds with five of his warriors had scrambled through the thicket and gained the wall that formed the brink of the canyon on the south.

By the edge was a massive boulder, a ton at least in weight.

With the hatchets the braves had felled a young cedar tree, and using it as a lever, forced the massive rock over the edge. Down it thundered into the mighty chasm straight for the spot whereon stood Talbot and the Indian girl.

CHAPTER IX.

A REINFORCEMENT.

CLEAR and distinctly sounded the footsteps from the gloom of the canyon.

With eager earnestness Talbot and the queen of the Shastas listened.

"No Indian!" exclaimed the girl suddenly; "white man!"

Talbot had also arrived at a similar conclusion. After the first moment of surprise his own good sense told him that a red-skinned foe would have crept up the canyon with all the crafty watchfulness of the panther, and that the first intimation of his presence would have been the sound of the feathered, barbed arrow, flying, bird-like, through the air.

It was evident that the new-comer was a white man, and plain also, that he had no suspicion of the strange scene that was transpiring at the mouth of the canyon.

"A reinforcement!" Talbot exclaimed.

Then round the little bend in the dark defile came the man whose footsteps had at first caused even Talbot's cool heart to beat a trifle quicker.

"This beats snakes!" cried the new-comer, as he halted at the bend and surveyed Talbot and his companion in great amazement.

It was Injun Dick's partner, burly Bill Brown. A reinforcement indeed!

Brown was scarcely a hundred yards away and readily understood the warning gesture that Talbot made. He saw at once that there was trouble brewing.

Slowly and cautiously he glided along the side of the canyon, keeping close to the wall until he reached the bottom of the little cascade and stood by Talbot's side.

"What's up, Dick, anyway?" he asked.

With a single gesture, Talbot directed Brown's attention to the bodies of the Indian warriors lying so motionless by the side of the clear streamlet.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed Brown, "this looks like business!"

"There are twenty or thirty more reds concealed behind the rocks and bushes up yonder," Talbot said.

"Friends of this yere tanned young man?" asked Brown, with a comical grin, referring to the Indian girl, whose presence with Talbot somewhat astonished him.

Yuet-a drew up her light figure as the miner spoke and looked at him scornfully. She was well enough acquainted with the language of the white man to understand that Brown had not spoken of her in a very respectful manner.

"No," Talbot replied; "it is Koo-chue, the Hog, and his McCloud warriors who have given me battle. This is a girl, not a boy, and she is one of the Shasta tribe."

"Twenty or thirty of them?" Brown asked, thoughtfully.

"Yes."

"We might as well retreat then," and as he spoke, the veteran miner heaved a deep sigh; "my little speculation has gone bust ag'in. We kin retreat, facing 'em, an' I really reckon that they won't come within range of our revolvers if they know it. It won't be healthy for them ef they do."

"There is very little danger of their making a rush against two of us," Talbot remarked. "I feared to risk a retreat when alone, for they might have attempted an advance in force and perhaps have succeeded in winging me with one of their arrows."

A long, wishful look, Brown gave at the little valley, then sighed mournfully.

"The signed land for sure, an' we've got to git up and git," he said, slowly; "mebbe, though, Billie

Brown will prospect through this yere clearin' yet, afore he passes in his checks."

"Let us retreat without attracting the observation of the Indians, if it be possible," Talbot suggested.

Cautiously and carefully the three plunged into the gloom of the canyon.

Not fifty steps had they proceeded, when, with a thunder like the roar of an avalanche, the enormous boulder, forced by the red-men's sinews over the edge of the canyon, came crashing down into the bed of the Shasta. By a miracle, almost, the three had escaped destruction.

"The red fiends are at the bottom of that!" Talbot cried, as the sound of the shock died away on the air. "Quick, let us get out of this!"

With eager steps the three hurried on. The Indians did not pursue; from the position they occupied they did not command a view of the canyon beyond the waterfall, although Talbot had imagined that they could. The McClouds trusted that both the white man and the Indian girl were crushed beneath the boulder, but they waited for the return of their chief before daring to proceed to ascertain the truth.

On the three went through the gloom of the deep canyon, splashing through the water, stumbling over the rocks, until at last they came to the end where the stream entered upon the Shasta valley.

No sound of pursuit had reached their ears, and now they were fairly out of danger, for they could see the motley buildings of the settlement so widely known as Cinnabar City. If the McCloud chief had been backed by every red-skin in his tribe, he would not have dared to pursue his prey into the Shasta valley.

The girl halted as they emerged from the canyon.

"Yuet-a will bid the white chief farewell, now," she said, addressing Talbot, and speaking in the Indian tongue. "She must go to her own people. She is sorry that the white chief can not leave his tribe and dwell with the red-men. He would be a king and could build his lodge of the yellow metal if it pleased him."

There was a tone of entreaty in the girl's voice; one last effort to win the pale-face, who had found favor in her eyes and pleased the fancy that the bravest of the red warriors had failed to catch.

"It can not be," Talbot said, gravely; "the chief already has a squaw with his own people."

"Let her come, too!" exclaimed the Indian girl, suddenly. "She shall be a sister to the queen of the Shastas. Yuet-a's heart is so large, that, for the sake of the white chief, she will share his lodge with another."

The untutored daughter of the northern wilderness was deeply in earnest.

Again Talbot shook his head.

"No, Yuet-a," he said, "the white squaw would not consent to that. She would not share the chief with any one."

The Indian girl drooped her head sadly and turned upon her heel to depart; then a sudden idea came to her, and she wheeled abruptly around.

"The white chief is a great man among his people," she demanded.

"Yes, one of the great men."

"Has he so many friends in his tribe that no white warrior can wrong him?"

Talbot hardly understood the drift of the question, but replied to it as well as he could.

"It is almost impossible to answer that," he said, honestly, "but I think that I have friends who would stand by me in the hour of danger; this man here is one."

The girl cast a quick, shrewd glance into the face of Brown, who stood near by, wondering at the conversation, few words of which he understood.

"He is no snake," the girl observed, evidently satisfied that she could read Brown's character in his face. "The time may come, though, when the white chief will want friends—the yellow metal maybe. Let him come to the queen of the Shastas and he will find both. He has saved Yuet-a from the McCloud hog, and she would die for the pale chief."

"You may be far from here when danger threatens me," Talbot suggested.

"No!" exclaimed the girl quickly. "The queen of the Shastas will watch over the brave white chief as the big mountain of her tribe, great Shasta, keeps guard over Northern California. Each night, when the little fires burn in the sky, Yuet-a will stand here beside the river, or, if she cannot come, she will send a trusty messenger instead, one as cunning as the beaver and as wise as the fox. If the chief wishes to see the Shasta queen, let him come here when the big white lamp is straight over his head. Let him ask and he shall be satisfied." Then, wheeling abruptly round again, the girl plunged into the thicket and disappeared from sight. For a moment the two could hear the sound of her light footsteps, and then the noise ceased and the silence of the wilderness ruled supreme.

"Well, now!" exclaimed Brown, helping himself to a huge "chaw of tobacco," "she's what I call a reg'lar screamer!"

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET MINE.

TALBOT remained motionless as a statue for a minute, gazing into the dense chaparral, into which the Indian girl had darted with all the swiftness of a frightened deer, as if he imagined that he could trace the flying footsteps of the Indian maid, despite the dense curtain, Nature's handiwork.

The lips of Injun Dick were tightly compressed, and there was a strange expression upon his usually calm face, and, as the light feet of the Shasta queen penetrated further and further into the thicket, and the sound thereof grew fainter and fainter, and, at last, ceased altogether, with a half-sigh Talbot seemed to descend from dream-land again to sober earth.

"I s'pose you didn't hear me intimate that I considered that tan-colored young feminine a reg'lar ripper!" Brown said. He had been watching Talbot's abstraction with considerable astonishment.

"Yes, I heard you remark something to that effect," was Talbot's calm reply.

"I didn't quite understand the outlandish lingo that she was spitting out so vigorously," continued Brown, "but, to the best of my knowledge and belief, I reckon that the young critter was telling you that she thought a heap of you. Oh, kin'dom come!

how her black eyes did sparkle! I say, Dick, I reckon on the old woman would have jest got her little back up if she had seen that she savage jest now." And then Brown indulged in a loud laugh.

Talbot couldn't resist smiling at the comical manner of the burly miner, grave as was the subject. "Just you keep quiet now, old fellow," he said; "Heaven knows that I was quite innocent of an intention of having any love affair with the girl, and, when I agreed to meet her up in the little valley yonder, I had no idea that she was any thing but a boy."

"Well, what did the little critter have to say, anyway?" Brown asked, his curiosity excited.

"What do you think of that?" was Talbot's answer, and he put the little golden nugget that he had received from the Indian girl into Brown's hand.

"Thunder!" exclaimed that worthy pioneer of '49, as he examined the nugget. His big gray eyes fairly stuck out of his head in astonishment as he looked upon the virgin gold.

Brown held up the lump in the center of his broad, brown palm, and as he balanced it, apparently testing the weight, Talbot surveyed him with a quiet smile.

"A reg'lar little sockdologer!" exclaimed the miner, in deep admiration. "Did you get this from the Indian gal?"

"Yes."

"I reckon that thar's a heap more whar this one came from," remarked Brown, thoughtfully.

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"I s'pose, in course, the Injun knows whar they are?"

"She stated so."

"Is she going to show you the place?"

Talbot shook his head.

"Oh, thunder!" exclaimed Brown, in disgust.

"I couldn't agree to the conditions that she imposed."

"Were they steep?" asked Brown, eagerly.

"No, not very; merely that I should take her for my squaw."

"Is that all?" cried Brown, evidently in a state of high excitement.

"About all."

"Which way did she go?" exclaimed the brawny miner, preparing to dart into the thicket. "Thunder! I'll marry her—marry a hull grist of them, young or old, tough or tender. Gol darn it! I'll marry any woman that owns a gold mine, an' I don't mind ef she is a leetle off color!" Then a sudden thought occurred to Brown and he hesitated. "Come to think of it, mebbe I wouldn't suit the young critter. I ain't quite so dandy-lookin' as you are, but thar's a heap sight more of me? What d'ye think? Is it worth while to foller up the 'lead'? Come, old man, advise me; shall I chip in?"

"Pass, partner!" replied Talbot, laconically.

"Can't I raise the blind?"

"Nary ante! Your hand in that game ain't worth a cent."

Brown indulged in a deep sigh, and shook his head mournfully.

"Old pard, if you kin persuade the gal to jine in my leetle game, I'll go cahoots with you; fairer I can't say."

"I don't think it is much use to try it, Billie," Talbot protested.

"I swow to thunder, ef I don't have the toughest tug-mutton luck!" Brown exclaimed, mournfully; "nary a chance for me to 'bile in' ary time. I remember in '52, down in the Gila country, one of the chaps of our party found an Injun, of the Apache tribe, all chawed up by a bear, an' he tended the red until he got well; an' then the 'buck' took the youngster off in the mountains an' jest weighted him down with little nuggets. I reckon that when the young cuss got back to camp he 'panned' out a cool five thousand dollars' worth of the 'clear stuff.'"

"It must have been trying to you," Talbot suggested.

"Tryin'!" expostulated Brown; "well, now you talk, and would you believe it, till we got back to civilization there wasn't one of the party who didn't go prowling round a huntin' for some chawed-up Injun, layin' round loose fur to pan a gold mine out of."

"Couldn't the young fellow take you back to the mine?"

"Nary take," Brown replied. "In the first place, he wasn't very sure about the locality, and in the second, when we tried that leetle game, the Apaches came down on us thicker than fleas in a Mexican ranch, an' we had to run mighty lively to save our topknots."

"The girl told me that she knew where there was a mine in the mountains, but of course without seeing it, I could not decide as to the truth of her story."

"Korect, pard, every time!" exclaimed Brown, with a great deal of emphasis. "I'm as sure of it, as if I had a-seen it with my own two lookin' eyes, as our darkey cook used to say. The whole lay of the country is in favor of it. These regions up above here must be full of mountain 'pockets.' I reckon I've cut my eye-teeth on the gold prospecting question," and the miner shook his head wisely as he made the assertion. "You know, pard, once on a time, all this country, clear 'way down to Frisco, was the bed of a big river with branches; then come a gen'ral convulsion, an' it kinder tumbled the mountains round loose an' kivered the rivers up, but whenever you strike the 'auriferous gravel' that was at the bottom of them air rivers, why then you strike 'pay-dirt,' and rich right down to the 'bed-rock.' I was on the trail, myself, old man; that was what fetched me up the leetle canyon yonder. I reckoned, mebbe, that I might tumble over a mountain 'pocket' somewhere an' rake out two or three thousand dollars right in the virgin lumps."

"If we can get things in working order again at the mine, we have got a fortune easy enough."

"That's so; true as preaching! All that I'm afcerd of is that the chaps in Frisco won't poney up the dimes for to start things again."

"Then we must trust to our own resources," Talbot replied, quietly but decidedly. "So long as I am a living, breathing man I will never give up the Cinnabar mine, unless I am convinced that its richness is but a phantom of our fancy, and that we have already struck the bed-rock."

"It ain't so, pard!" Brown cried, earnestly. "I know it ain't so! I'll bet the shirt off my back on it!"

"I'll bet my boots! I'll bet even the leetle Injun gal!"

Talbot laughed at the emphasis of the other.

"Come, let us get back to the town," he said; "I shouldn't be surprised to find the special agent from San Francisco there."

"I hope that they've sent us a chap that knows a good thing when he sees it," Brown grumbled, following Talbot toward the mining camp. "But, I say, pardner, I'm r'ally in earnest 'bout the tan-colored gal. Jest you propose me next time you see her, I'll marry her and all her relations, male an' female, if they'll throw in a gold mine."

CHAPTER XI.

A CHARACTER.

TALBOT and Brown proceeded down the bank of the Shasta toward the famous city of Cinnabar. We say "famous" advisedly, for the mining camp by the swift-flowing Shasta was a famous place in the eyes—and mouths—of the hardy adventurers who were peopling Northern California, and who were slowly, but surely, driving the red-men from the little fertile valleys by the water-courses in the rocky peaks and dark canyons of the mountain ranges, just as the ancestors of the Indians, centuries before, had driven out a weaker race.

"By the by!" exclaimed Talbot, suddenly, just before they reached the outskirts of the town, "I suppose that it is hardly necessary for me to caution you not to mention anything in regard to this Indian girl or her gold mine?"

"Oh, of course, I understand," Brown replied. "Two words about a gold placer up yonder would start off half the town in search of it, and the Injuns would be sure to make trouble, an' a long war with them would knock fits out of us. Of course, they would be whipped in the end, but the fight would render things mighty uncertain while it lasted."

Just as Brown finished his speech, he noticed a man a hundred yards or so on, sitting on a stone close to the bank of the river, gazing intently into the stream. The stranger was resting his head on his hands, and sat as still as if he had been fixed immovably to the stone. Brown called Talbot's attention to the fellow.

"Guess he's a stranger," the miner observed; "he don't look familiar, an' he's such a strange-looking cuss. I think that I should have remembered him ef I had ever seen him before."

As the two drew near, the man lifted his head, took a long look at them, and then rose from his seat, and with a good-natured grin on his face advanced to meet them with outstretched hands.

As he came on, the two men had an opportunity to examine him.

Brown had described the stranger quite correctly in regard to his general appearance, when he had stated him to be "a strange-looking cuss."

He was about five feet in height; round and plump in limb; his red face, loaded with fat, shone out from under the ragged rim of the high, bell-crowned felt hat that he wore, like a new moon breaking through a rift in an evening cloud; a huge tawny beard that ornamented the chin made the face seem rounder than it naturally was; the eyes were more like the eyes of a fish than a human being, so glassy and bead-like were they, and they actually protruded from his head. The dress of the man, ragged, greasy, and so besmirched with mud that it was almost impossible to tell the original color, did not add to the personal attractiveness of the smiling, huge-mouthed visitor.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Brown, in an undertone of deep disgust, as the man came grinning onward. "I believe a cake of soap would make that fellow sick!"

"Rather he'd make the soap sick," Talbot replied.

When the stranger got within ten feet of the two, who naturally halted, perceiving that he intended to accost them, he came to a stop also, and struck a theatrical attitude, his legs wide apart and both hands upraised.

"Now, so help me Bob, if I expected this!" the greasy fellow cried, in a sort of a shrill squeal.

Brown and Talbot looked at each other in considerable astonishment at this strange greeting. As neither one of them had seen the person before, to their knowledge, they couldn't understand what on earth he meant.

"It is too much, ha! ha!" wildly yelled the ragged man, and he beat his arms against his breast.

Brown stepped back a pace and doubled up his brawny fist in alarm. "He's got the jimjams, by thunder!" he exclaimed, cautiously, in Talbot's ear.

"No; he's sober enough," Dick protested.

"The sight of you two sharps here on this barren waste, and with the ge-lorious beams of the sun a-shinin' down on yer, is good for sore eyes!" cried the stranger, making a dart forward with outstretched hand.

Both Talbot and Brown recoiled; neither one cared to take the fat paw so profusely garnished with dirt.

A moment the bearded fellow gazed upon them, an expression of incredulous wonder upon his dirty face.

"What! kin I believe my eyes? Don't you know me?" and then he extended both hands, pathetically, opened his mouth, as if he intended to swallow both of the two, and rolled his eyes around in their sockets, until Talbot and Brown began to be alarmed and wonder if he would ever be able to get them right again.

"No, I don't know you!" declared Brown.

"And you—don't you remember me, Richard?" and the stranger sighed deeply as he addressed Talbot.

"No; I never saw you before," Talbot answered, considerably amused by the stranger's antics. Brown was affected differently. He was getting indignant.

"Oh! So help me Bob, did you ever hear any thing like this before?" The stranger appeared to some imaginary individual up in the air over his head.

"It almost makes me weep!" Then the man of grease banged his fists against his fat stomach and howled dismally.

"Oh, shut up yer noise an' get out of the way!" growled Brown, advancing a step in such an ex-

tre mely menacing way that the stranger retreated in decided alarm, as he cried:

"Hullo, sport, let up! You wouldn't hit a feller yer know! Why, William, don't you remember when we used to play poker, five cents ante, down at Mud Springs?"

"No, I don't; an' I never was thar," Brown retorted.

"Kin it be that me brain is wandering?" ejaculated the stranger, smashing in the crown of his aged and weather-worn hat with violent energy; then he extended both hands to Talbot. "Kin you not remember me, old pard—when we used to go to school together, and play in the medder amid the hay—"

"Where?" demanded Talbot, suddenly.

The abrupt question floored the greasy stranger, so to speak. He rolled his eyes around mechanically, opened and shut his huge mouth for a moment or two, like a dying dolphin gasping for air, then a bright idea struck him.

"Why, jest as if you didn't know; shell I mention the spot? Never! Shall I tell the 'sharps' round here? Not much, you bet! It is safe locked up in my bosom. All right, pard; wild hosses couldn't tear the secret from me," and the vagabond smiled, beamingly, and winked in a very knowing manner at Talbot, as much as to assure him that every thing was O. K.

"Looker hyer!" exclaimed Brown, abruptly; "you're a dead beat, you are!"

The stranger drew himself up with an air of dignity; "Kin I be drunk, or am I sober?" he questioned with an air of profound reflection. "Do I hear Joe Bowers—the orig'nal Joe Bowers—called a beat? Oh, Billie B'own, how could you? The man wot calls me a beat insults the lady I board with. No other man but you, Billie, could call me a beat an' live a minit; but as it's you I'll pass over it. I will even drink with you; or, what is the same, you kin pay me a quarter. I prefer just now to take my fluid solid."

And Mr. Joe Bowers extended his dirty paw toward Brown.

This was too much for the stalwart miner's risibles, and he burst into a roar.

"Hyer, take the quarter," he said, tossing it into Mr. Bowers's paw. "It's worth a quarter to see a first-class fraud, any day."

With graceful and easy dignity Mr. Bowers deposited the quarter somewhere among his rags, and as he did so he winked at Talbot.

"Billie must have his little joke, you know, but for the sake of the days that are 'played,' as the poet says, I looks over it."

Talbot could not forbear smiling at the cool impudence of the rascal, whereon Mr. Bowers took advantage to approach quite close to him, somewhat to Talbot's annoyance.

"Pardon me," Mr. Bowers said, persuasively, "but between friends, you know—old timers—have you a dollar that you can spare just as well as not?"

"No, sir," replied Talbot, shortly.

"Ah!" Mr. Bowers looked thoughtful; "it makes no difference, though. Could you be so kind as to direct me to the chateau of my esteemed friend, Mr. Andrew Jackson Hardin, commonly called Kentuck?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPECIAL AGENT.

"HARDIN, eh?" Brown questioned; "Kentuck, the gambler?"

"Wal, now you speak of it, I reckon he does finger the papers onc't on a while," said Bowers, with a grin. "He's a buzam friend of mine—an old pard."

"He hangs out at the Last Chance saloon," Brown said, curtly.

"Billie, I thank you!" exclaimed Mr. Bowers, raising his battered-up hat with an air of stately dignity.

"Look'er yere, ef you call me Billy ag'in, I'll jest crawl all over you!" cried Brown, indignant at the familiarity of the fellow.

Bowers started back a step, and struck his breast with his fist in a very tragic manner.

"Oh, Mr. Brown! can I ever tutor my wayward tongue to call you any thing but the old familiar Billie of our childhood's days?" Then Mr. Bowers lifted up his voice and howled dismally for a moment.

"Get out, you fraud!" shouted the burly miner, not at all affected by the vehement sorrow of the greasy and pathetic Mr. Bowers.

"Good-by—O'river!" responded "the fraud," retreating rapidly for a few paces. "I forgive yer, old pard; ag'in a friend I can not bear malice. The orig'nal Joe Bowers never goes back on an old pard. Ta, ta, Richard; I'll see you ag'in—so long!" And with this parting salutation, and a dignified wave of his dirty paw, the orig'nal Joe Bowers turned round and headed for the town.

"He's what I call 'the clean white thing' in the dead beat line!" Brown exclaimed, as he watched the retreat of the ragamuffin.

"He's a character," Talbot confessed. "I ought to have given the fellow a quarter—the exhibition was worth it."

The two now resumed their progress onward to the mining camp.

"I wonder if the chap is one of Kentuck's gang?"

"No, I think not," Talbot replied. "He has probably heard of this Hardin as being one of the principal sporting men in the town, just as he got our names and descriptions from some one and then laid in wait for us."

"Thunder! I didn't think of that!" exclaimed Brown. "I thought at first that I had met the cuss somewhar, but I knew that it wasn't at Mud Springs, for I was never thar."

"I don't generally forget faces," Talbot remarked, "although I've seen a few in my time, and I knew the minute that I set eyes on this fellow that he was a stranger to me."

"I reckon he won't make any thing out of Kentuck," observed Brown. "I don't know much about the man, but from what leetle I have seen, I think he's about the hardest-hearted an' the coolest-headed rascal that I ever happened to run across."

"Yes, that's about the measure I've taken of him," Talbot admitted.

"When he first set up his shebang yere he tried mighty hard to ring me in for to have a leetle game, but the thing wouldn't hold water. I've seen the 'tiger' an' felt his claws, an' I reckon that I ain't

hankering much for a tussle with the critter. I reckon that no man ever really made any money gamblin'. It's dead open an' shut game in the long run. A man is bound to lose. 'Sides, I remember an old sayin' that I heard when I was a boy East, 'what's got over the devil's back will go under the devil's belly.' Pard, it's gospel truth, too!"

"Yes, 'ill got, ill gone," Talbot added. "A man cannot prosper on such gains."

"That's so!" protested Brown, decidedly. "I don't mind a leetle quiet hand at poker with jest enough anted up to pay for oysters and fixin's, but when it comes to right down gamblin', you kin count this chicken out. Hasn't this Kentuck ever tried to rope you into his place?"

"Oh, yes, and if he gets to be too big a nuisance I shall take a hand one of these days an' bu'st up the whole concern."

Talbot's words, coupled with the quiet way in which he had uttered them, rather astonished Brown.

"You understand somethin' about the 'papers' then?"

"Enough to flax this Kentuck, smart as he thinks himself," Talbot replied, quietly.

"Dick, I swow I'd give a five to see you bu'st up the ranch!" exclaimed Brown, excitedly. "You ain't forgot wh. t I told you about this sport's boast-in' that he'd run us out of town?"

"Not much," Talbot said, laconically, but with a peculiar ring in his voice that spoke volumes.

"Dick, we two ought to be able to flax this galoot!"

"Yes, he and all his tribe."

Talbot had little idea though when he made the speech, of the extent of the "tribe" of Andrew Jackson Hardin, late of the State of Kentucky.

Right on the outskirts of the town was the Cinnabar mine, and as the two approached the works, the watchman of the company, a stout Irishman, answering to the name of O'Rourke, informed Talbot that a gentleman in the office desired to see him.

"It's a stranger, Mister Talbot," he said; "a well-fed gentleman—from Frisco too, I'll go bail."

"The special agent, by thunder!" exclaimed Brown, in Talbot's ear.

"I hope so," replied Talbot, his face lighting up; "we're all ready to start, ain't we?"

"Yes, 'bout; I'll go an' take a look at the canal before the darkness comes," said Brown. "Put it to him, pard; ef they'll gi'n us a few thousand it will take over four oughts to buy out my share of this strike."

Then Brown started off to where the workmen were putting the finishing touches to the repairs on the canal, and Talbot entered the little wooden shanty near the mouth of the mine, over the door of which a rude sign bore the legend:

CINNABAR QUARTZ MINING CO. OFFICE.

The little shanty was only some twelve feet square by eight high. In one corner, by the sole window, stood a rude desk, skillfully constructed out of a common dry-goods box, propped up on four bowlders, one at each corner. A stool, deftly made by knocking out the top of a candle-box and putting four legs in the corners, stood behind the desk. This was the office furniture of the Superintendent of the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company. On the other side of the window a smaller box with the side knocked out, placed upon the floor, and a candle-box standing on end answered for a desk and stool for the foreman of the aforesaid mining company. Boxes of various shapes and sizes, containing soap, candles, dried fish, crackers, flannel shirts, felt-hats, brogans, boots and half a dozen other articles, lumbered up the room, almost filling the space from floor to ceiling, so that there was only a narrow passageway left open from the door to the "desk" at the rear end of the room.

The shanty was not only an office but a storehouse as well.

Sitting on the desk of the foreman, clad in a dark suit that showed evident signs of how rough the journey was from Yreka up the valley of the Shasta, was Hosa Congleton, Esq., Special Agent from the directors of the Cinnabar Mining Company at San Francisco to investigate the way things really were at Cinnabar City.

As Talbot came in, Congleton took a good, long look at him from under his protruding eyebrows.

"Mr. Talbot, I reckon," Congleton said, still keeping his seat upon the box.

"Yes, sir."

"My name is Congleton—Hosa Congleton from San Francisco. I am a special agent to examine into the condition of this mine; letter from the president."

Talbot took the letter and opened it; it simply introduced Mr. Congleton, and stated that he had been intrusted with full discretion in all matters appertaining to the mine.

"I am glad to see you, sir," Talbot said, in his quiet way. He, too, had used his eyes and he was not greatly taken with the personal appearance of the special agent.

"I reckon things are pretty bad around these yere parts, Mister Superintendent!" Congleton exclaimed, abruptly. "I hain't seen much, but what I have seen indicates that the Cinnabar mine has gone bu'st, and the quicker we wind up the company and sell out, the better, by blazes!"

Talbot looked at the "special agent" in astonishment.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BLUFF GAME.

"You surely do not think that it would be advisable to give up the mine altogether?" Talbot said, lowly.

"Well, I rather think I do!" was Congleton's prompt answer.

"Mr. Congleton, I think the chances are after you have thoroughly examined the affairs of the mine you will change your opinion."

"I don't think that is a likely thing," Congleton replied. "The trouble, Mr. Superintendent Talbot, is just hyer; you folks that run these mining operations are generally reluctant to quit work while a solitary chance remains. You go ahead, hoping and hoping that the ore will get richer as you penetrate into the ledge; you keep drawing and drawing on us flats in Frisco, who plank down the solid stuff to keep things running, until at last we weaken and the consarn goes to t'arnal smash. Mind, Mr. Superintendent, I don't blame you a bit for sticking to the

thing. I wouldn't give a cent for a man who couldn't and wouldn't stick where his bread and butter was consarned; but I'm a right, straightforward, plain man of business, and I've had all the kinks taken out of me by hard knocks. I'm just old business from the word go. I'm satisfied that the mine is played out, and the best thing for the hull on us to do is to look the matter right squar' in the eye, so to speak, you know."

Talbot had been watching the special agent intently during the delivery of his bluff and rather offensive speech. Dick was puzzled. Why the man should jump so suddenly to the conclusion that the mine was worthless was beyond his comprehension.

"Mr. Congleton, don't you think you had better examine the works before you make up your mind definitely?" Talbot said. "I think I shall be able to convince you that the mine is all right, and that the deeper we get into the ledge the better the ore will get."

"Let me see!" exclaimed Congleton, abruptly; "you want about ten thousand dollars to start the works again, I believe?"

"No, we can start without a cent," Talbot replied.

"In fact, we will get to work to-morrow; but if we had a few thousand dollars' worth of machinery more suited to the character of our ore, it would be almost certain to increase the product a third at least. Then we are behind with the hands; there is nearly two months' pay due them. And of course, Mr. Congleton, you are aware that it is a pretty hard job to keep men to work in this region without their regular pay."

"Yes, I s'pose so," Congleton grunted, rather than said.

"The money due the hands presses us more than anything else, but even that payment I suppose I could stave off if the money couldn't be got."

"Then you can start the stamps again to-morrow, eh?" Congleton asked, in a thoughtful kind of way.

"Yes."

"And I s'pose that by the way the ore pans out to-morrow you think that you can satisfy me that the mine is all O. K., eh?"

"No, the ore we have got on hand will only pay two or three dollars per ton profit; but the new ore that the men are getting now increases in richness every inch. I propose to test some of that ore in a rough way, just to let you see what the mine will do in the future."

"See hyer, Mr. Superintendent!" exclaimed Congleton, roughly and abruptly, "I'm an old bird, I am! Ask about me in San Francisco, and they'll tell you that my eye-teeth were cut long ago. I'm rough and ready, Mr. Superintendent, but the man that tries to pull the wool over my eyes will have to get up rather early in the morning. You can't play any 'salted' mine on me, you know!"

And then Congleton shook his head knowingly, and looked into Talbot's face in such an insolent way that Dick's blood began to boil.

Involuntarily Talbot's hands clenched and he took a single step toward the special agent, and so manifest was his hostile intention in his face that Congleton jumped with wonderful alacrity from his seat upon the "desk" and took refuge, in decided alarm, behind the box.

"Hallo! what d'ye mean?" he exclaimed, thrusting his hand behind him as he spoke, as if to grasp a pistol.

It was a moment before Dick replied, for all the angry passions of his nature had been roused by the insolence of the stranger.

"Mr. Special Agent," he said, at length, "I reckon that you don't know who you are talking to. I've a good mind to take you by the neck and throw you out of the shanty."

And just at that moment the San Francisco "sharp" had a decided belief that the enraged superintendent could easily carry out his threat.

"Be careful, sir!" exclaimed Congleton; "remember my position. I am armed, sir, too."

"I reckon you wouldn't use your weapons much if I got my hands on you once," Talbot remarked, quietly.

Congleton by this time had come to the conclusion that he had "waked up the wrong passenger," and, although a big, burly fellow, almost twice as large as Talbot, yet he had no desire to try "conclusions" with the superintendent. Something in Talbot's manner plainly indicated that he was not to be trifled with. To use the common phrase, the special agent "took water."

"Really, Mister Superintendent, I assure you that I did not intend to wound your feelings. I trust that you will overlook any hasty or careless remark made by me in the heat of discussion," Congleton said, endeavoring to be civil. "I may be a leetle rough, but I'm generally straightforward and come right to the pint. I've seen so much skull-duggery about these hyer mines and testing ore that it ain't to be wondered at that I'm naturally a leetle suspicious."

"Mr. Congleton, will you let me ask you a question?" demanded Talbot, in his quiet way.

"Certainly—what is it?" answered the speculator, endeavoring to assume an air of unconcern he was far from feeling.

"I own outright fifty shares in this company, or I should say, to bring in my partner, Brown, we own one hundred shares of the Cinnabar stock, one-fifth of the entire capital; we have spent every dollar almost that we had in the world to get the thing started; now, then, what two men on earth have greater reason to wish the mine to succeed, or would be more apt to drop it like a hot potato if we found that it was played out?"

"Yes, of course; I understand all that," Congleton observed, with an air of great wisdom, "but you might sell out, you know."

"I reckon, from what the Frisco papers says, that the money sharps there ain't eager to invest in Cinnabar stock," Dick replied, curtly.

"That's true."

"But now to return to business; I want to show you that the mine is all right. I'll call my partner; we'll go into the shaft, and with your own hand you shall detach a piece of ore; Brown shall smash and wash it for you, and if it don't run at the rate of fifty dollars a ton, I'll make you a present of my shares in the mine."

"That's fair enough!" Congleton exclaimed, emerging from behind the box.

"Inside of an hour, you'll believe in the Cinnabar

lude," Talbot said, as he led the way from the shanty.

Brown happened to be standing right at the mouth of the mine, and the two approached him.

The tunnel of the Cinnabar company extended into the rock some twenty feet.

The mouth of the tunnel was surrounded by a wide stockade fence.

"Do you guard the mine?" Congleton asked, with a glance at the watchman, O'Rourke, who was sitting on a bowlder near by, smoking a short black pipe.

"Yes, it is necessary, else the ore would be carried off at night; that is, if the light-fingered gentry got any idea that it would 'pan out' well," Talbot replied.

Then he introduced Congleton to Brown.

"No men at work, I see," said the agent, as he stepped inside the stockade and peered into the mouth of the tunnel.

"No, all at work on the canal," Brown answered. "We can let the water on in the morning and start the stamps ag'in."

"Mr. Brown, will you show Mr. Congleton where the last lot of ore was taken out?" Talbot asked.

CHAPTER XIV.

A "STOCK" OPERATION.

"CERTAINLY; step right inside."

The two followed the foreman into the tunnel.

Brown took a candle-end from his pocket and a match; lit the candle and led the way to the end of the tunnel.

A heap of ore and a pick, carelessly cast down by its side, showed where the workmen had been extracting the treasures of the mine.

"Take up the pick, Brown," Talbot said, extending his hand for the lighted candle. "I want you to knock off a fresh piece of quartz for Mr. Congleton here, then 'wash' it up for him, so that he can be satisfied that we have got a good thing."

Brown looked rather astonished, but gave the candle to Talbot, and stooping, took up the pick.

"Now, Mr. Congleton, if you will be kind enough to examine the surface of the rock," Talbot said, stepping forward and holding the candle within six inches of the irregular wall; "I want you to see that this is the genuine article; no humbug about it, but just as the force of nature formed it when she piled all these mountains down on the old river."

"Oh, it's 'blue gravel,' sure enough!" Brown exclaimed, poising the pick and bringing it down with a mighty stroke against the rocky wall.

Congleton stooped eagerly and picked up the fragments displaced by the blow, while Brown leaned upon the handle of the pick and looked at the special agent in considerable astonishment.

"Now, sir, if you will walk into the mill, Mr. Brown will pulverize the ore and 'wash' it up for you."

Without a word the speculator followed Talbot, and Brown brought up the rear.

In the mill the foreman pulverized the ore, then in a pan, such as are commonly used by a "prospector," he washed away the base materials from the golden grains until only the heavy sand and the precious metal remained; this residue was amalgamated with a little mercury, thus separating the gold from the sand, and the work was done.

Congleton watched the process very intently. He had dabbled enough in mines and mining to be pretty well posted.

Brown weighed the gold obtained and then multiplied the amount.

"Pretty rich 'pay-dirt,'" the foreman observed, laying down his pencil and handing the reckoning to Congleton for his inspection.

"How much?" Talbot asked.

"About seventy dollars per ton."

Congleton devoured the figures with his eyes in breathless earnestness. He was hardly willing to believe the evidence of either eyes or ears.

But the figures were all right—no mistake, and there was the shining gold before him.

"Are you sure that this is correct?" the speculator asked, shaking his head as if he was in doubt.

"I'll bet you all the stock I own in this hyer consarn ag'in five dollars that thar is nary a mistake 'bout it!" Brown exclaimed, confidently.

Congleton's hand fairly trembled as he held the paper. This bid fair to be the great strike of his life.

"But the vein may play right out," he observed.

"Nary play out atween hyer and the other side of the divide!" exclaimed Brown, confidently, "and 'I reckon that that's 'bout five miles through the solid rock."

"You see, Mr. Congleton, that the mine hasn't gone back on us yet," Dick remarked, with a quiet smile.

Congleton's eyes wandered dubiously from the superintendent to the foreman, and then back again to the superintendent. He did not hear the words that Talbot had addressed to him, for a magnificent idea had taken possession of his mind. He had quickly formed an estimate of both Talbot and Brown. Clear, cool-headed, resolute men that they were, it was clearly the better policy to have them friends than foes. If he could but carry out his idea.

"I suppose that you two gentlemen would object to parting with your interest in this hyer mine," the speculator said.

"Oh, no!" Dick replied, "I guess that Mr. Brown and I would be quite willing to get out, if we could find anybody to give us our price."

"And how much would you demand?"

"About a hundred thousand dollars."

Congleton gave utterance to a low whistle.

"Why, gents, that's a fortune!" he exclaimed.

"So is a hundred shares of Cinnabar mining stock," replied Talbot, "or it will be a fortune before a year is over."

"The stock wouldn't fetch fifty in the Frisco market."

"That's likely," Talbot responded, with an air of indifference, "but, Mr. Congleton, I put it to you as a judge of that sort of thing, what will the stock be worth when it gets out that we can make a profit of sixty dollars a ton out of our ore?"

"Ah, that will take some time; you need money; suppose the company refuse to advance any more?"

"I suppose we would have to get along without it."

"You would hold on to the mine, anyway?"

"You bet!"

This terse and easily-comprehended ejaculation from Brown completely settled Congleton's mind upon that point.

"This is a very strange circumstance, gents," the speculator said, slowly, and after a pause; "the president and directors down in Frisco think that the mine is done for. If I should go back to the city and report that the mine was worthless, the moment the news got out the Cinnabar stock wouldn't be worth twenty-five cents on a dollar." And as he uttered the observation, from under his bushy eyebrows, Congleton watched the faces of the two men eagerly. Brown didn't perceive the drift of the "feeler;" and although Talbot did, he didn't let Congleton perceive it. He wanted to hear him out. It was the old idea, "Give him rope enough and he'll hang himself."

"Ah, do you think so?" Talbot questioned in the most innocent manner possible.

"I'm sure of it!" the speculator exclaimed.

"Then it would be what you 'stock' gentlemen call a shrewd operation to circulate the report, and so get the shares all into the hands of the inside ring?"

"Yes, but the ring have got about all the shares, now," Congleton replied, quickly; "they had to buy 'em up to keep the bottom from tumbling out of the 'hull consarn, when the canal bu'sted."

"At any rate they'll realize a great profit on their investments!"

"Yes, but don't you see, Talbot, what a splendid chance there is for skinning the 'ring' themselves, if I was mean enough to go back on 'em?" Congleton exclaimed, eagerly, coming quite close to Dick.

"How so?" Talbot pretended extreme ignorance, while Brown really was at a loss to guess the meaning of the speculator.

"Why, don't you see? The company have sent me up hyer as a special agent to investigate the condition of the mine. I go back to Frisco and say that the thing has gone to 'tarnal smash; that the machinery has bu'sted, and the ore won't pay for working. I'll fix it so that the thing leaks out and gets into the papers; down tumbles the stock, of course. I throw my shares and your shares into the market, with orders to sell at any price. Through a broker I buy 'em right in again, and then pitch 'em on the market ag'in. All the rest get frightened, and pile in to sell at any price. We gobble up the shares at almost nothing; call a meeting of stockholders—us three only—elect a president and board of directors—us three again; start the mine and make a hundred or two hundred thousand dollars out of the thing, clear profit."

"But how about the money to buy up the shares?" Talbot asked; while Brown, lost in silent wonder at the rascality of the "special agent," stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment.

"I can fix that; that is, if I was mean enough to play any such game," and here Congleton winked facetiously at the superintendent.

"Yes; and if we were mean enough to aid you to rob the men that trust you; but we ain't," Talbot remarked, quietly. "So you'll go back to Frisco and tell them that the Cinnabar mine is O. K., and the stock worth a hundred cents on the dollar, at the least!"

CHAPTER XV.

KENTUCK'S HOME.

THE "Last Chance Saloon," conducted by the sporting gentleman who proudly proclaimed that his name was Andrew Jackson Hardin, from the State of Kentucky, was not a very imposing structure. It was merely a long, low, one-story shanty constructed out of rough boards. But rough and rude as it was, it was the largest building, and by far the most imposing, of all the structures, that, classed together, made up Cinnabar City.

The building was about twenty feet wide, and about fifty long.

Over the door the sign, painted with considerable skill, bore the inscription:

"LAST CHANCE SALOON."

When Mr. Hardin had first affixed this very descriptive sign to the "fore-front" of his shanty—as O'Rourke had observed—the honest miners understood at once, from the mystic emblems displayed thereon, that in the interior of the building you could drain the flowing bowl, play cards, or chuck dice, or listen to the magic strains of music's soothing notes; the aforesaid music furnished by an aged colored gentleman picking on "de ole banjo!" The only thing that puzzled the citizens of Cinnabar, was to decide which was a man's "last chance," the bottle, the gaming-table, or the old nigger with the banjo. We believe the colored gentleman carried the day, for the majority of the miners decided that, after a man had listened to about three of the old ducky's tunes, he was perfectly willing to die to avoid further torture.

Entering the front door of the saloon, one beheld a bar-room. The bar extended along the side of the room for about twenty feet, and then came a partition with a door in it. Passing through the door, the second room was devoted to the goddess, Fortune; or in other words, it was a gaming saloon, where the miners risked their hard-earned gains upon the uncertain chance of luck. Due credit must be given to the "sporting" men of the mining regions that their "game" was generally an honest one. In fact, had it been otherwise, and the miners discovered it, small chance would the "sports" have had of escaping with their lives from their victims.

The gentleman with the banjo was an adjunct to Dame Fortune's dominions.

The gaming-saloon was about twenty by twenty in size. A faro "lay-out"—a suit of cards placed upon a green cloth, in regular order—occupied the large table in the center of the room. A couple of small tables, in one of the corners, were evidently for the accommodation of poker-parties, if they chose to honor the saloon with their presence instead of indulging in the alluring game in the sanctity of their own domicils.

Beyond the gaming-saloon was a third room, much smaller than the first two. This was the private apartment of the proprietor of the "Last Chance," Mr. Hardin, more commonly termed, however, "Kentuck."

The red-headed young man who acted as Mr. Hardin's barkeeper, and who was known far and wide

as Foxy Greek—some irreverent miner, disguised in liquor, had once termed the young man a foxy-headed Greek, simply because his hair was red, and Ireland was his birth-place; and the name had stuck to him so closely that his own original appellation had been entirely forgotten—was busy preparing for the business of the night. The day trade of the "Last Chance," in common with the rest of the saloons in the mining region, did not amount to much. It was only after the day's toil was done that the brawny, flannel-shirted, big-footed, and huge whiskered seekers after fortune, flocked into town. Then Cinnabar City was looking lively, and a "gay place to tie up at," to use the local parlance.

The barkeeper was busy polishing a tumbler and whistling lowly to himself, when the door of the saloon was opened, and a frowsy head, surmounted by a shockingly bad hat, was poked into the room.

The young man with the red head suspended his operations and looked at the stranger in wonder. The patrons of the "Last Chance" were not, as a general thing, particularly fastidious in regard to their personal appearance; and a decently-dressed man was the exception, not the rule; but the bearded stranger with his bloated face, bleared eyes, and general disreputable appearance was something out of the common run.

The stranger glanced around the room, then at the wonder-struck barkeeper, and commenced to wink at him in a most peculiar manner.

"What do you mane by actin' like that, ye non-descript ye?" demanded the young man, as soon as he could recover from his astonishment.

Then the stranger introduced the whole of his body through the doorway, much in the same way that a snake would have wormed himself in, closed the door behind him, struck a tragic attitude, and pushed back the greasy hat from his forehead.

The barkeeper surveyed the movement with wonder and apprehension.

"Oh! Foxy, don't you know me; old Joe Bowers?" yelled the stranger, at the top of his voice; then he extended his arms as if he intended to rush forward and clasp the barkeeper to his greasy bosom.

Foxy seized a bottle in alarm and shook it menacingly at "old Joe Bowers."

"Oh! to the devil wid ye!" he cried; "where would I know the likes of ye?"

"What!" exclaimed the greasy man, in a sort of prolonged howl; "have you, oh, Foxy! forgot the original Joe Bowers, your old pard, when you used for to sling drinks at Yankee Jim? Hav' you went back on the halcyon hours at Grass Valley and Red Dog? It can't be! me ears deceive me! Oh! how I have worn thee in my heart of hearts, old top, and now thou knowest me not! It is too much; it lacerates the heart of the original Joe Bowers! Oh, oh!"

Then, overcome by his emotions, the wanderer staggered to the counter, leaning his head upon it and moaned, faintly:

"Give me whisky, old pard, or I kin not stand it!"

"Arrah, git out!" cried the barkeeper, shoving back his ancient friend rudely from the counter; "let me see the color of your money first, or divil a sup will yees git here, d'ye mind?"

"Kin you think of money when you see your pard suffering fur a leetle fire-water?" demanded Mr. Bowers, in the most feeling manner possible.

But the hard-hearted young man who represented the notorious "Kentuck" was not at all affected.

"Oh, go to blazes an' shake yerself!" he retorted, indignantly. "I niver set me two eyes on yees before, and bedad I don't care a straw how long it is before I see ye ag'in. Ye'll get no whisky in this she-bang until I lay me fist on yer money."

"Are the ties of friendship nothing, rocks?" cried Mr. Bowers, indignantly, yet with a touch of sadness visible in his voice.

"Git out, ye fraud!" the barkeeper exclaimed, quickly.

"An', Foxy, kin you refuse an old pard like the original Joe Bowers four fingers of whisky 'ca'se he hasn't got the ducats handy, an' his banker has gone out o' town?" asked Mr. Bowers, coaxingly.

"Be me sowl! I'll be after breakin' your back for yees if ye don't lave this quick!" The barkeeper was getting exasperated.

Mr. Bowers retreated cautiously to the door, and held it open so as to secure a retreat in case the fiery young man manifested any intention of carrying out his threat; this done, he sighed deeply, and shook his head in a very mournful manner.

"Foxy, old pard, I forgive you; you will be sorry when I'm gone. You will reflect and say, rather than refuse old-time rocks, the original Joe Bowers, I ought for to have put a bottle of fire-water into his hand and sed, 'Go it, old pard; heaven bless you, me chylid!' Oh, if your dook was hyer, old Andy Jackson Hardin, that I used to go to school with in the town of Harrodsburg, Kentucky, he would have acted differently. I say it ag'in, an' I say it boldly—that noble son of the State of Kentucky, Andrew Jackson Hardin—"

"Well, what do you want with him?" asked "Kentuck" in person, walking into the room just then.

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD TIMES.

THE original Joe Bowers was taken a little aback by the abrupt entrance of the man with whose name he was making so free, but the members of the genus "bummer" are not easily abashed.

Just for a moment the seedy vagabond gazed with open mouth into the face of the "sport," then he lifted up his voice and cried aloud:

"It is, so help me Bob! it is my old pard, Kentuck; oh! this is a joyful moment! Off into the stilly night when the lively musketer sung his love-song an' dipped his leetle bill into the sleeping galeots, hav' I dreamed of this moment!" Overcome by his emotions, Mr. Joe Bowers advanced with outstretched arms toward Kentuck, as if with intent to fall and weep upon his bosom.

"Look out! what are you 'bout?" cried Kentuck, retreating in disgust from the approach of the bummer.

"Oh, Andy, kin I not hold thee to this beatin' heart, jest onc' for old-times rocks?" exclaimed Mr. Bowers, pathetically.

"Get out, you fraud!" cried Hardin, indignantly; "are you drunk or crazy?"

"No, Andy," replied the greasy stranger, mourn-

fully. "I kinnot get drunk in your ranch, for nary drop of tangle-foot would that red-headed angel yonder sling out unto me. I tole him that you and I were old pards, but he sed it was 'played,' an' I were jes' a-goin' to levant as a gentleman should when his honor is doubted."

"Why, I never saw you before in my life!" Hardin exclaimed.

"He sed that he wint to the same school wid yees, bad 'cess to him!" cried the barkeeper.

"An' so I did, you Paddy whack!" replied Mr. Bowers, scornfully.

The barkeeper fairly jumped up and down behind his counter, boiling over with rage.

"I'm a native 'Merican, you first-class bummer, ye, an' if yees call me a Paddy whack ag'in, I'll bate yees black an' blue!" and Foxy shook his fist defiantly at Mr. Bowers, but that individual only surveyed him with a beaming smile.

"Foxy's allers the same," he said, addressing Kentuck, in a serio-confidential manner, "allers the same red-headed, open-hearted chylid of natur'. When I hears the boys talk 'bout this whisky-h'ister an' t'other p'ison-slinger, I allers tells 'em give me Foxy, Kentuck's right bower, for a man you kin 'pend upon every time. You kin put your hand on him an' he's thar! That's what I tells 'em, an' I further seys, gentlemen, I puts my pile on Foxy, an' I don't keer who knows it!"

The angry barkeeper was not at all appeased by these flattering remarks, but still continued to scowl savagely at the original Joe Bowers.

"See here, do you want to see me for anything?" Kentuck demanded.

"Nothin' 'ticular, old pard," replied Mr. Bowers, bluntly. "I was jest a-passin' by, an' I asked a 'pilgrim' whar I could get some licker fit fur a gentleman's stomach, an' he seys to me, this pilgrim did, 'Stranger, strike a bee-line for the Last Chance; thar's the spot whar good liquor is got, an' Andy Jackson Hardin is his name. 'Kin I believe me ears?' I cried; 'kin it be possible that it is the Andy of me chylidhood days, way back in old Kentucky?' An' then this 'pilgrim' he seys to me, he seys, 'Stranger, you've struck in rich, for the sport is from Kentucky! Then, Andy, old pard, I jes' hugged that 'pilgrim' thar an' then, an' made tracks for this hyer shanty."

"You're a fraud, you are!" exclaimed Kentuck, abruptly. "I never saw you before in my life; you can't play that on me. Now, you'd better get out. Your little game's bu'sted."

"Kin it be possible that my old friend goes back on me, the orig'nal Joe Bowers?" and Mr. Bowers howled loudly, in his anguish. "Kin you not remember our old stamping-ground, Harrodsburg, Kentucky, Mercer county, whar they raise the fattest cattle, the fastest hosses, the puttiest gals, an' the finest whisky under the eternal sun?"

Hardin's brow grew dark at the mention of the Kentucky town, and he cast a quick and troubled glance into the face of the inveterate bummer. It seemed as if he was seeking in the swollen and discolored features to discover traces of a face once familiar to him; but, if such was his object, the look upon his face clearly betrayed that he had not succeeded.

"Are you from Harrodsburg, Kentucky?" Hardin asked, evidently puzzled in his mind in regard to something connected with the greasy and dilapidated stranger.

"I am; I'm one of the products of that air noble State! They used to call me the Flower of Mercer county!" Mr. Bowers replied, with dignity.

"And you used to go to school with me?"

"Oh, you kin bet your pile on that! it's a four-ace hand, old pard!" Mr. Bowers was emphatic.

"What's your name?"

"Joseph Bowers, Esq.," and he cocked his battered-up hat rakishly over his eyes as he spoke.

For a moment Hardin surveyed the stranger, a thoughtful expression upon his face; then he appeared to come to a sudden decision.

"You're a dead beat, out and out!" he exclaimed.

"I never saw you before, and I was never in Harrodsburg; I come from Paducah, McCracken county."

"Kin I be deceived?" exclaimed Mr. Bowers, striking his breast with his left hand in a tragic manner, and opening his huge mouth to its widest extent.

"I reckon you are," remarked Kentuck; "and now you had better travel."

"It kin not be possible!"

"Well, it just is; git!" Kentuck said, tersely.

"Mr. Hardin, if I am wrong in my prognosis, I forgive you!" Mr. Bowers observed, blandly; "sich things will happen in the best regulated families; but, Mr. Hardin, could you tell a 'pilgrim' whar he could strike a job to tackle fur his daily hash?"

"No, I can't," responded Kentuck, shortly; "I don't keep an intelligence office."

"Kin you not make room for another barkeeper?" suggested Mr. Bowers, insinuatingly. "I'm the liveliest cock-tail juggler that ever was seen. I kin throw out more whisky an' take in more dust in a single night than any other man in Northern California."

"Throw yourself outside of more whisky you mean," remarked Kentuck, in a tone of disparagement, but Mr. Bowers was heedless of the insinuation.

"I'm the man for your money, Mr. Hardin; jes' try me."

"Chief cook and bottle-washer, cap'n of the waiters, Set him on his head, peel two bags of 'taters.'"

But Kentuck neither appreciated Mr. Bowers's offer nor his poetry.

"Don't want you!" he exclaimed; "quit your howling and get out!"

"I tell you what, Andy, old pard, jes' gimme a show an' I'll allow that the orig'nal ole Joe Bowers is with his weight in dust for a first-class p'ison juggler. Why, the very sight of my face is 'nuff to rope 'em right in for a drink. I've got more nat'ral talent fur throwin' whisky over the bar than any two-legged man from hyer to Frisco. Jes' see me juggle that bottle onc'."

Mr. Bowers made an advance toward the bar, but Foxy seized the bottle and drew back his arm, threateningly.

"Let up, old pard!" exclaimed Mr. Bowers, halting in indignation; "lemme show the boss how I kin sling out the fluid!"

Kentuck concluded that it would be folly to waste further words upon the intrepid bummer, so he at once seized him by the back of the neck, wheeled

him round, facing the door, and dextrously applying the toe of his boot, kicked him out of doors.

The sudden assault sent Mr. Bowers headlong into the street, and down upon his hands and knees.

Picking himself up slowly, he turned around and addressed the irritated proprietor of the Last Chance saloon, a beaming smile upon his face:

"All right, I understand; you don't hav' to say much to old Joe. When a gentl'man intimates that he wants me to go, I allers understand. You did that well, Andy, old pard; most scientific thing I've seen fur a long while; couldn't be beat round this hyer ranch; I'll go my pile on that, old fel', every time. Say, Andy, could you lend a feller a quarter? I want to buy some postage stamps to write to my banker."

"Get out!" Hardin slammed the door in disgust. Then Mr. Joe Bowers shook his fist indignantly at the saloon.

"I'll get even with you, old pard; never was kicked fur nothin' afore in my life! I allers got a quarter fur that luxury."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SITUATION.

CONGLETON'S heavy under jaw dropped as he listened to Talbot's words, and a look of sullen anger came over his face. Too late he saw how the calm and quiet superintendent had led him on to explain his rascally scheme without meaning to assist him in the least: and as he reflected how skillfully he—the "Fri'sco sharp"—had been induced to make a fool of himself, by the able wit of the mere mining "boss," there came up in his heart such feelings of rage that he could have gladly killed Talbot on the spot. It was only by a great effort that he restrained himself from an open display of his intense disgust.

And Talbot, coolly watching the features of the "special agent," who had been intrusted with the control of a great mining company; and who had so calmly and deliberately plotted to rob the men who trusted him, and seize upon their golden chance for himself, really enjoyed the discomfiture so plainly apparent in Congleton's face; while Brown, whose sense of humor was decidedly keen, only refrained from indulging in one of his horse-laughs, by turning it into a violent fit of coughing.

"Yes, sir; you may go back to Frisco, Mr. Special Agent, and tell the good folks there that the Cinnabar lode is as good a one as ever was struck in Northern California."

"Ah, yes, of course," muttered Congleton, in confusion.

"Tell them to hold on to their stock, and not to part with it for less than a hundred and fifty. If the ore increases in richness, as I think it will in the next fifty feet, it will pan out as rich as any one of the Grass-Valley strikes."

"Yes; it's lucky that things look so well," the speculator observed, absently.

"You see, I was quite correct when I told you that I could change your opinion in regard to the value of the Cinnabar stocks."

"Yes, I see," Congleton was rather at a loss for words.

"Now of course you can return and cheer up the hearts of the Cinnabar stockholders; you have pretty good proof of what the lode is really worth. There is nothing like a man seeing things with his own eyes."

"Ah, yes;" and then a brilliant idea came to the speculator; he saw a way to get out of the awkward position into which his uncautious words had placed him. His face brightened up, and a look of profound wisdom came over his hard features.

"Of course, Mr. Talbot, you understand the drift of my remarks a few minutes ago?"

"Yes, I believe I comprehend your meaning," the superintendent replied dryly.

"You and Mr. Brown are of course strangers to me, and as special agent of the company, deputed with full power to act as the company itself, it was only natural that I should want to understand the style of men running the machine."

"Well, I hope, Mr. Congleton, that you are pretty well acquainted with my style, although you haven't seen much of me," Talbot remarked, his face calm, but a latent touch of devilry apparent in his tone.

"Oh, yes, I'm quite satisfied!" the speculator spoke, hastily. "I see that you are not to be influenced by any enemies of the Cinnabar Company. In fact, am fully satisfied that you are not to be bought. I trust that you, as a man of business, will appreciate the little trap that I laid just now to draw you out."

"Oh, certainly," returned Talbot, with easy politeness; "it was very cleverly done, too, Mr. Congleton; the smartest man in the world would have believed that you were fully in earnest, and that you intended to sell out the interest of the men who selected you to look after the affairs of the mine."

"That's so!" exclaimed Brown, and then he gave utterance to a horse laugh which grated harshly on the ears of the special agent; but Congleton concealed his annoyance with a forced laugh.

"Well, gentlemen, I reckon we understand each other now," with a very well-assumed appearance of hearty satisfaction and frank openness.

"Yes; I think you are quite right about that, Mr. Congleton," Talbot observed, not the shadow of a smile upon his face. "For my part I am quite sure that we understand each other."

Brown gave just one look at Talbot's features, and then turned away to conceal a smile. He understood the delicate insinuation.

Congleton did not appear to notice the doubtful assurance, and affected to appear quite satisfied.

"There is nothing like having the working folks of a thing of this sort all O. K.," added the speculator. "If the parties that find the funds and the men that disburse them are all working together, the machine runs smooth."

"Well, Mr. Congleton, as far as the foreman and superintendent of the Cinnabar mine are concerned, you can tell the directors of the company that it will take more money than any sane man would care to offer to buy them to smash the concern which they are paid to manage. The books of the company are right here in the office, ready for your examination, at any minute. They will show where every dollar has gone to, and I really reckon that there hasn't been much dust wasted. In fact, the footings of the books, counting the supplies on hand at their cash value, will show there has been more money expend-

ed than I have received from the company, and from the product of the stamps."

"How can that be?" asked Congleton, in astonishment.

"The company's money ran out just as the canal broke, and the money that I realized from the sales of ore on hand, crushed but not washed, was only sufficient to pay the hands for a single week. We have been shut down just four weeks now to-day, and the second week Brown and myself advanced the money to the company out of our own private resources, to settle. I sent a full statement of just how things stood to San Francisco, and stated that unless we received money enough to square the labor bills up, that we should be compelled to stop just where we were. The president wrote that I must keep things running, and that he would send a special agent with money. That was three weeks ago. The only way we could keep the men on was to pay them or give them good assurance that they would be paid. As I have said, Brown and myself squared the bills the first week; that took five hundred dollars cash from us, which brought us down to the bed-rock."

"Cleaned you out, eh?"

"Yes; the labor bills amount to six hundred per week; but the store run a hundred, and eased us up that much."

"Then there's two weeks' pay due the hands?"

"Yes; two weeks Saturday last, and this is Monday."

"And you have no money?"

"Yes we have; there's two hundred and ten dollars in the treasury of the Cinnabar Company at this present moment."

"Where did you get it from?" asked Congleton, in astonishment.

"From the store—sales of goods during the past two weeks," Talbot replied. "I laid in the goods to supply our own hands; but when I found that we were going to run short of money, I quietly got word around town that the Cinnabar Company would sell their stock at cost prices, so we built up quite a little business. We have the store open every night now."

For the first time Congleton began to realize what a job he had taken in hand, when he had made up his mind to "throw" the superintendent of the Cinnabar mine. But the prize was such a golden one that it was worthy a desperate struggle.

"Then you have two hundred dollars, about, to pay twelve hundred with?"

"That's correct."

"I suppose that if you couldn't pay, the hands would wait willingly enough?" Congleton suggested.

"Some would and others wouldn't," Talbot replied; "but the moment it gets 'round that there's a special agent of the company here, I doubt if there's a man of them would do a stroke of work without his money."

"That's bad, for I've brought no funds with me," Congleton said, abruptly.

Talbot's brows knitted, and Brown looked astonished.

"But I can doubtless get funds from San Francisco in a week or so, upon the receipt there of a favorable report."

"I'm afraid that we will have trouble then," Talbot remarked, with a grave look upon his face.

"Oh, I reckon not!" Congleton said, carelessly. "Well, gents, I'm much obliged. I'll jes' take a look 'round the town. I'll see you again to-night."

As the door closed after the speculator, Brown caught Talbot's eye.

"What do you think, old man?" the foreman asked.

"He's an ugly customer, and we're going to have trouble."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GAMBLER'S LUCK.

CONGLETON strolled carelessly down the street toward the center of the mining camp. His face wore a very sober look and his brows were wrinkled with lines that told of deep reflection.

"I reckon that this hyer thing ain't as easy as rolling off a log," he muttered to himself, in deep abstraction, as he walked along. "This cuss will show fight, sure. It will take considerable work to boost him out of the Cinnabar Company, but it will be did. I reckon Hosa Congleton, Esq., don't generally turn back when he puts his hand to the plow. Durn the fellow! I'll be ready for him the next time it comes to fight talk. It ain't often that H. Congleton, the Frisco shark, takes water—not often does he crawl, and I reckon he won't ag'in. Now I'll see what stuff this broadcloth sport is made of. He was right; it's a big stake!"

And as the speculator walked along he reflected upon the details of the interview which he had just had with the superintendent of the Cinnabar Company, and the more he thought of the matter the greater grew the rage in his heart against the man he could neither buy nor use.

"I would rather have gone cohorts with him than with this outside party," he muttered. "The confounded idiot! I never saw a man so blind to his own interest before. I would have thrown this sport overboard if I could have fixed the matter with Talbot; but since it ain't to be, why he'll jist have to git out. Thar ain't many men in this world kin cross the path of Hosa Congleton, Esq., and live to boast of it. When I stretch out my hand, it's like old death a-feelin' for 'em."

And just as the unscrupulous speculator uttered the vaunt, and stretched his long, hairy fingers out as if in illustration of his words, he happened to raise his eyes and saw the sign of the Last Chance Saloon.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, coming to an abrupt halt; "there's the place now. 'Last Chance,' eh? Well, now, that fits in correct. Talbot was my first and this fellow is my last chance to make a big strike out of the Cinnabar mine."

Smiling at the conceit, the speculator entered the saloon. Foxy, the barkeeper, alone was visible. He ducked his head in salutation as Congleton entered. The barkeeper saw at once that the speculator was a stranger.

"Isn't this Mr. Hardin's place?" Congleton asked.

"Tis, sur," answered Foxy, promptly.

"Is he in?"

"Yis, sur."

"I'd like to see him on a little business; say Mr. Congleton wishes to see him."

Foxy departed and in a moment returned with Kentuck in person, from the inner room.

"I didn't expect you so soon," Kentuck said; "come into my private room. Foxy, if any one wishes to see me, except Yankee Jim, tell 'em that I'm out and won't be home till dark. If Jim comes, tell me."

Hardin then conducted the speculator through the gambling saloon into his little room at the back of the house.

Congleton was considerably astonished at the manner in which the private apartment of the gambler was furnished. The Last Chance building was nothing but a big wooden shanty, constructed in the cheapest and easiest manner; the bar-room and the saloon dedicated to King Faro, were only two bare apartments, the walls and ceilings whitewashed, and the floors covered with sawdust loosely sprinkled over the rough boards; but the little room, Kentuck's snugger, was neat and pretty as a lady's boudoir. The rough ceiling was hid by blue cotton cloth tacked to the rafters with little brass-headed nails. The walls were hung with similar stuff. The floor was covered with a tasty, small-figured blue and yellow carpet. The furniture comprised a bed—the bedding made up as neat as wax, and covered with a snowy quilt—a bureau, a small table, a rocking-chair, and two common ones. But strangest of all, from the ceiling, pendent from a gilt hook, swung a bird-cage with a bright little canary perched within.

The room was lighted by a single window only, and that was high up in the wall and looked into the gaming saloon.

Kentuck noticed the look of amazement upon Congleton's face as he glanced around the apartment.

"Didn't expect to see a shebang fixed up like this, in these yere diggings, I reckon?" the sport remarked.

"No, I confess I didn't. You appear to be pretty comfortably situated here?"

"Yes; it cost a heap of money to get these things up from Yreka though, but we can't live but once, an' I wasn't raised in a wilderness."

"But the bird," said Congleton, pointing to the canary.

"That beats your game, eh?"

"Yes, rather; you don't appear to be the kind of man to take to a thing of that kind."

"You're right thar!" exclaimed Kentuck, abruptly. "I won that bird in my place in Yreka; kinder curious, too. There was a soft-headed fellow, all worn out with the fever, came into my place one night, and bucked the bank until he was busted; then he went out and came back with that bird. He said it was a pet of his wife who had come with him up to the mines and died thar, and for her sake he had held onto the bird. Well, to make a long story short, he wanted to stake the critter. Seem' the cuss had run his pile out at my table, I couldn't very well go back on him, and as I wanted to do the squar' thing, I jist allowed him five dollars' worth of chips. He slung 'em all down on the queen and lost like the durned fool that he was. He jes' gave one look when the queen came up on the wrong side, and then gave a yell and rushed out. I never seen him arter that time. I didn't want the bird anyway and I thought mebbe that the cuss would come back arter it, so I jist put it away. And now, sport, comes the hull strength of the story. Afore I got the bird, things were rough with me, but from that night they changed right round, an' the 'bank' made money, hand over fist, 'cept when the bird happened to be sick. If that little yaller galoot stays up on his perch all day long, with his head down in between his shoulders, jes' like a man with the fever, an' won't eat nothin', then I dive for my pile, because it's a sure sign that luck will run bad that night; but if he's lively an' hoppin' round his cage during the day, then the bank will run O. K. that night."

"That's a strange superstition," the speculator remarked, in astonishment. He was not familiar with the peculiar ideas in regard to luck so common to men who risk their fortune upon the turning of a card and depend entirely upon the green cloth and the painted pictures for their daily bread.

"Well, it may be a superstition," the sport said, reflectively, "but, rocks, it would take a pile of money to buy the bird from me. Now, I jes' tell you one little instance. When I started this place, the first two nights I was open the bird was on the road and didn't get through. Those two nights the 'bank' lost 'bout two thousand dollars; pretty heavy loss considerin' that bets were limited to a hundred, and the very night that the bird got in the bank was losin' again, but the moment the little feller spread himself and h'isted his wings around, luck turned and the 'bank' won."

The grave face of Kentuck and his earnest manner were ample proof that he fully believed in his theory.

"Suppose the bird should die?" Congleton asked.

"Sport, the Last Chance would see nary a card flipped up out of the box for a week at least. I'd give the streak of luck time to turn."

"You seem to have a pretty good thing of it here," the speculator observed.

"Yes, as far as the money is concerned, I'm doing well enough; but it's an awful life," Kentuck said, soberly. "There ain't hardly a man risks his money in my place that don't really hunger for my life if the wrong card comes up and I rake in his dust. A man who runs a gambling shop in this yere country does it with his life in his hand. You see, I don't have any windows looking to the outside, except in the front of the building. Why, after I've closed up the concern at night, I've heard the scamps prowling up and down outside, jes' mad to let daylight through my carcass. They've fired into the room two or three times, but the wall is double and the space between filled in with dirt—a regular breastwork."

"I should think that they would go for you in the daytime," Congleton suggested.

"That has happened five or six times, but 'Jack has allers been as good as his master," replied the sport, coolly. "If it comes to drawin' shootin' irons, you can bet your bottom dollar no man gets the 'drop' on me. I reckon to have first fire every time."

"Well, to come to business," said Congleton, ab-

ruptly, "I am ready to go in with you, but it will be no easy job to get Talbot out."
"I'll do it!" cried Kentuck; "I'll do it if it takes the heart right out of me!"

CHAPTER XIX. IN COUNCIL.

CONGLETON made a grimace of Kentuck's vaunting speech.

"Don't you believe that I kin run Talbot out?" the sport questioned, noticing that look upon the face of the speculator.

"It won't be easy," Congleton observed, doubtfully.

"Big strikes ain't to be got easy in this world!" Kentuck replied, sagely, "but, as sure as I sit here, I'll run him out."

"But the way?"

"That's what I'm coming to; take it easy, rocks; when I start in to break a bank, I allers calculate the chances before I put down my 'checks.' Now, don't run away with the idea that because I said in my emphatic way I was going to win the trick, that I'm going to rush in like a mad bull, keener whether thar's a corral of bushes or a solid rock wall afore me; nary time. I said that I would run Talbot out of the Cinnabar mine if it took the heart right out of me. Now that's my game and I'm going to play a winning hand, so I must 'stock' the pack and ring in a 'cold' deal on the Superintendent of the Cinnabar Company."

"You have some plan in view, then?" said Congleton, just a little surprised.

"Co'rect, old man!" exclaimed Kentuck, emphatically. "I have just got the little deal arranged that will win my game, I reckon."

"Go ahead and explain."

"In the first place let us understand each other," Kentuck observed, in his usual impassive way.

"Sit down," and the sport pulled two chairs up to the little table, then produced a small flask and a couple of wine-glasses from one of the bureau drawers.

Congleton sat down, Kentuck filled the wine-glasses from the flask, pushed one toward the speculator, and sat down on the unoccupied chair, and took the other glass in his hand.

"Take a little brandy; it's a prime article, twenty years old; no poison about it; it's some that I keep for my own private use; it will clear your head. I'll give you a toast, too; Luck to the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company—that's you and me, rocks."

Kentuck took a sip of the brandy and laughed at his own witty remark.

"Now, first and foremost, do you accept the proposition that I made to you in your office in Frisco?"

"That is to fix things so as to get possession of this mine hyer?"

"Co'rect!"

"It's a bargain."

"Shake," said Kentuck, laconically.

As the thin, white fingers of the gambler closed over the horny palm of the brawny speculator, Kentuck looked Congleton straight in the eye.

"Now, the fair thing is," Kentuck said, slowly, still retaining Congleton's hand within his own, "we share alike after the job is done, but if you put in ten thousand dollars to my five, or I two thousand to your one, as the case may be, the extra amount is to be paid over to the man who advanced it out of the profits of the mine before any division is made."

"That's perfectly fair," Congleton remarked; "do you want any papers drawn up?"

"Nary paper," replied the sport, laconically. "I reckon we understand each other. If I was going to try to beat you, rocks, all the papers in Californy wouldn't stop me."

"But the legal papers might stop me, you know, if I took it into my head to go back on our agreement," Congleton suggested, a twinkle in his shrewd eyes.

"I reckon, pardner, that if you were to beat me out of my share in this yere transaction, your heirs would stand a heap sight better chance than you of enjoying the spiles," Kentuck's meaning was quite plain.

"I guess we understand each other," the speculator observed, with an appearance of great frankness.

"I reckon so."

Then Kentuck released Congleton's hand and took another sip of the brandy.

"I s'pose you understand the way affairs are fixed?"

"Oh, yes; I had a long talk with Talbot and Brown."

"They think that the mine is big?"

"Yes, no chance of buying them out. They are going to start the stamps again to-morrow."

"I'll bet two to one they don't, if I say the word!" Kentuck exclaimed.

"Aha! you've got things in working order so soon?"

"I reckon so; in the first place how much money has Talbot got in the treasury?"

"About two hundred dollars."

"And he owes the hands nigh on to twelve hundred."

"But they will be apt to wait for their money if he distributes the two hundred among them, and then, too, if he is hard pushed, he has a lot of goods in store that he might be able to raise some money on. And if he gets the stamps to work, he'll be able to get an advance from the express company, possibly."

"Well, we must block all these moves," Kentuck announced. "Thar's one man that runs the hands, and I run that one man. If I say strike, strike it is! Not only that, but I'll fix it so that they will neither work themselves nor let anybody else work. As to raising money on the goods, I reckon it can't be done. Thar ain't many hundred dollars laying round loose in this yere town."

"But if he gets the stamps in working order—"

"But nary stamp will be work!" interrupted Kentuck, decidedly. "I reckon the strikers won't let things run until they get their money."

"Talbot may show fight."

"So much the better," Kentuck replied; "he isn't the only man that carries a shootin'-iron in this yere city. If thar is a scrimmage, it's ten to one that

somebody wings him, and that would save us a heap of trouble."

"I've got an idea!" exclaimed Congleton, suddenly; "an idea that may work well. I have full authority from the directors of the company at San Francisco; suppose that I remove both Talbot and Brown from their offices upon the plea that they have squandered the money of the company and that their management has ruined the mine."

"Pretty good, pard, but I reckon that they wouldn't go. They would be mighty apt to stick, and to tell both you and the directors to go to blazes."

"Then we've got 'em!" cried the speculator, exultingly. "We call upon the law to step in and enforce our rights."

"Yes, but we hav'n't got any law here yet," Kentuck remarked. "Next week we're going to elect a mayor, though, and form a regular city government."

"Then we'll be all right."

"S'pose the mayor won't act in our interest?" suggested Kentuck.

"We must take care to elect a man that will. Who are the candidates?"

"Only two up, Billy MacArdle, an old Scotchman, president of the Dundee Company; they run the Blue Bonnet and the Dundee lodes. Did you notice a small concern just outside the city as you came up from Yreka?"

Congleton nodded assent.

"Old Red Billy, they call him; he's a close-fisted old cuss, but pop'lar with the best men of the town."

"Could we use him?" Congleton asked, significantly.

"Nary use," responded Kentuck, laconically.

"He's a cross-grained old galoot, contrary as a mule. If he had his way, he'd shut up all sich places as mine, durn him!"

"I shouldn't think that such a man would be acceptable to the inhabitants of this delightful region, judging from what I have seen of it," Congleton remarked.

"Well, I tell you what it is, rocks; Cinnabar is a good deal like the rest of the mining camps, looks worse than it is. Thar's a heap of men round this yere town that don't trouble whisky much and never lay out a dollar on keards."

"But the other candidate?"

"Jimmy Hughes; he keeps the Dry-Up Hotel; that's the white-washed building over the way. Jimmy is very pop'lar with the boys, keeps the best liquor in town—no better judge of whisky this side of Frisco."

"I should think that his chances would be good now!"

"Well, I don't know," Kentuck observed. "Talbot and Brown and nearly all the big men are backing Mac; they've got the rocks and influence."

"Do you think that Hughes would be accessible to reason if he was elected?" Congleton asked, with a suggestive wink.

"I reckon a hundred dollars would plug Jimmy's eyes up so tight that he'd be willing to sw'ar black was white and white no color at all."

"He's the man for our money," Congleton exclaimed, decidedly. "We must elect him, Hardin, if we don't succeed in getting Talbot out before the election comes on. I've had some little experience in the election line east. I reckon we kin fix things. What are the regulations in regard to voters?"

"Any man that's been in the city ten days."

"And the inspectors who receive the vote?"

"Two for each side; the city is divided into two wards, upper and lower."

"Splendid chance for our men to vote twice," protested Congleton, briskly, rubbing his hands.

"We'll give 'em a lively shake, anyway," Kentuck replied.

Foxy, sticking his head into the room, interrupted the conversation.

"Here's Yankee Jim; d'ye want him?" the bar-keeper asked.

"Yes, start him in!"

The barkeeper's head disappeared.

"He's the man that runs the hands on the Cinnabar work."

CHAPTER XX.

YANKEE JIM.

"AND we can use this fellow?"

"I reckon so; he hates Talbot like p'ison. Jim's a bruiser, and the superintendent interfered one day when he was thrashing a man smaller than himself."

"I should have thought he would have 'gone' for Talbot."

"The galoot was ready for him with his shootin'-irons, and Yankee knew it. He would have drilled daylight through Jim quicker'n lightning."

The opening of the door cut short further conversation. A stout, muscularly-built individual, clad in a blue flannel shirt, rough pantaloons, stuck into big boots, and a dilapidated felt hat, entered the room. His face was round, brutal and ugly; the broken nose, the bull-dog-like jaw, retreating forehead and thick neck would have delighted an admirer of the exponents of the so-called "manly" art of self-defense.

Yankee Jim was an English-Irishman; that is, the child of parents who had emigrated from the Green Isle to the land of joys and roast beef. What his right name was no one knew, and how he had come to be termed "Yankee" was a mystery, which we doubt if even the man himself could solve. But he was pretty well known as Yankee Jim to the denizens of the different mining camps in the north, for since he had made his appearance in the mining region, he had been concerned in some half a dozen prize-fights and at least ten or fifteen shooting and cutting affairs.

"How are you, Yank?" said Kentuck, as the bully slouched into the room. "How's things?"

"Rough," responded Yankee.

"Got any money from the Cinnabar folks?"

"Nary dime."

"This is the special agent of the company from Frisco, Mr. Congleton."

"How d'ye do?" said Yankee, ducking his head. "I hope that you've brought up the dust to pay off the boys."

"I'm sorry, my friend, to say that I hav'n't," Congleton replied; "the fact is, the company's broke."

"That's bad," observed Yankee, in disgust.

"Mr. Talbot informs me that he intends to start the works to-morrow; perhaps he knows of some way to raise the money to pay off the boys," Congleton suggested.

"He won't start no work here till he ponies down the dust that's due us!" exclaimed Yankee, savagely.

"That's the talk, Yank!" said Kentuck, encouragingly; "jest stick to that! Don't let 'em touch a stick nor a piece of machinery until you get your dust. The quicker this Talbot gets out the better it will be for the boys. A new man and a new company would make things fly round yere."

"That's so!" exclaimed Yankee, emphatically; "this superintendent puts on Chinamen in the place of decent white men. Why, we've got two in our gang now. I've jist bin a-stirrin' the boys up. They'll clean out them pig-tails 'fore long, and Mister Superintendent with them if he dares to interfere."

Hardly had the words left his lips when there came a tremendous series of yells from the street.

Yankee started to the door.

"I'll go bail that the boys are arter the heathen now!" he cried.

All three at once proceeded to the street, Kentuck taking particular care to lock the door of his private room after him.

As Yankee had guessed, it was the "boys" "going" for the unfortunate Chinamen.

Down the road ran the Celestials, their somber garments covered with dust, and their long cues streaming behind them in the air, while, close at their heels, came ten or fifteen rough, red-shirted, huge-bearded whites.

"Kill 'em! Lynch 'em! Hang the heathens!"

Wild were the shouts and angry the voices of the miners.

The hunted Chinamen ran straight for the stockade which hemmed in the Cinnabar mine, and disappeared within the opening.

"Now we've got 'em!" cried the leader of the rabble, flourishing a huge bowie-knife; "come on, boys; we'll skin the yaller cusses!"

But as the rabble were about to rush into the yard they were suddenly confronted by Talbot and Brown at the opening.

"Hello, fellow-citizens, what's the trouble?" exclaimed Talbot, as he faced the excited throng.

"Them heathens!" gasped the self-constituted leader of the crowd, a little out of breath from the exertions he had made.

"The Chinamen?" asked Talbot, blandly, as if he was in total ignorance of the object of the excited men.

"Yes, yes!" yelled the members of the crowd.

"Well, what of them?" queried the superintendent, smiling, calm and serene, in the faces of the scowling miners.

"We want 'em!" cried the leader of the rabble, rather puzzled at Talbot's coolness.

"All right, I'll tell 'em so," responded Dick, with extreme politeness. "Brown, just tell the Chinamen that a distinguished delegation of their fellow-citizens are waiting for them out here."

Four or five of the crowd, who had simply joined in the chase for the fun of the thing, snickered at this, but the leader of the little mob and three or four more, who were the instigators of the affair, scowled and began to handle their weapons in a very significant manner.

"Look hyer, pilgrim!" cried the ringleader of the crowd, a burly fellow known as Long Tom Merigan, and reputed to be a very bad character in every respect, "we don't want no chin-music; we're on business, we are. Phaps you don't know who I am; I'm Judge Lynch, and this hyer crowd is my court, an' we jest want them two heathens."

"See here, pilgrim," said Talbot, imitating the manner of the other, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I really reckon that this city don't require any of Judge Lynch's work just now. I really doubt your authority to act."

"You doubt my authority, do you?" cried "Judge Lynch," in a bullying way, flourishing his big knife almost in Talbot's face.

"Yes, I do," replied Talbot, slowly, putting his hands in the pockets of the loose sack-coat he wore in the most careless way in the world.

"By the living blazes!" cried the rough, fiercely, "if you don't git, I'll cut you up into mince-meat. I'm Long Tom Merigan, from Pike, Missouri, I am! I'm jest living death when I'm riled! Jest you smell of that!" and the bully thrust his knife within a foot of Talbot's nose.

Talbot jumped back a step, raised up the right skirt of his coat, the hand still in the pocket, and fired the derringer contained within, without taking the trouble to draw it.

With an awful howl, "Long Tom Merigan from Pike" went over on his back in the dust, and the crowd behind him scattered like a heap of dried leaves before the blast of a November gale.

Those of the crowd on the outside who had merely joined in to see the fun had no disposition to stand as targets for Talbot's shots; as one of them expressed it, "it was none of his funeral," and as for the three or four who were really in earnest to lynch the heathens, the sudden and complete downfall of the gigantic Missourian was quite enough for them.

Heads were peering round the corners of the neighboring shanties, eager to witness the end of the trouble.

The "member from Pike" was rolling around in the dust, howling in the most dreadful manner.

"Anybody else wants to step up to the captain's office and settle?" asked Dick, his hand on his revolver.

"All down but nine, pard; rake 'em in!" suggested a brawny, yellow-bearded miner from behind the shelter of a huge bowlder which hardly concealed his stalwart proportions.

"Will anybody give this man from Pike a decent funeral?" asked Dick, advancing to where the giant was wallowing in the dust.

At the suggestion, another piteous yeowl came from the prostrate "Judge Lynch."

Then, to the surprise of all the lookers-on, Talbot bestowed a few hearty kicks upon the wounded man, which served to produce a series of yells which were far to prove that the lungs of Long Tom were a-right.

"Get up, you big baby!" cried Talbot, in contempt, booting the prostrate man, as he spoke, in an extremely dexterous and scientific manner.

"You're not killed; I only shot off the tip of your ear."

Long Tom suddenly stopped his yelling, while the bystanders, roaring with laughter, came from their "fortifications" and gathered round him, Talbot returning to the shelter of the mine again.

Slowly and sheepishly the man from Pike gathered himself together.

As Talbot had said, the ball had just cut the tip of the ear.

Long Tom did not wait to hear the comments of the miners, but left at once for the suburbs.

"The fellow is plucky," Kentuck observed to Congleton, referring to Talbot.

"Yes, but I reckon his defense of the Chinaman will cost the party he supports fifty votes when the election comes," Congleton said, shrewdly.

CHAPTER XXI. THE STRIKE.

Talbot and his wife, Catherine, were at breakfast. The few years that had elapsed since we traced the fortunes of "John Rimee" in the pages of Rocky Mountain Rob, had wrought but little change in the face of the fair young girl. The dark, lustrous eyes were still the same; still the little jetty ringlets clustered over the olive-tinged brow.

The face was a trifle paler, for she was suffering from a severe cold.

Talbot's quick eyes noticed the pallor of the face, and his apprehensions were excited.

"You don't look well this morning, Kate," he said.

"I passed a very bad night," she replied. "I was troubled with terrible dreams."

"Of what nature?"

"I can't tell," she said, "only that you seemed to be in danger and I was powerless to help you. Three or four times at least I woke with a sudden start, chilled to the heart with terror."

"Probably only a light fever attack," Talbot suggested, cheerfully.

"Perhaps so; and yet I feel a strange, vague apprehension of danger that I cannot account for."

A vigorous knock at the door interrupted the conversation. Talbot rose and admitted Brown.

A single look at the sober face of the foreman was quite sufficient to inform Talbot that there was mischief afoot.

"Well?" Talbot asked.

"The hands have struck!"

Few words, but much information.

"How did it come about?" Talbot questioned.

"It was all cut and dried beforehand, I reckon," Brown replied. "I ordered all hands to be at the canal, ready to let the water in, this morning. I jes' started up thar; the men were on hand all right, but when I got within twenty feet of 'em, I saw thar was trouble ahead, an' the long an' the short of the matter was, that they all declined to put their hands to the tools until their back wages were paid."

"What put such an idea into their heads?" Talbot asked, in astonishment. "I should think that their own common sense would tell them that they stand a better chance to get their money if the mill goes to work than if they compel it to remain idle."

"That's jest their leetle game!" cried Brown, abruptly. "The spokesman of the party told me that, until they got what was owing to them, they would neither work themselves nor let anybody else work."

Talbot's brow knitted, and the cold, hard, white look, which boded such danger, came over his face.

"They intend to take such action, then, that we cannot raise the money to pay them, however good our will?" he queried.

"Thar's somethin' underneath this hyer hull business that I don't understand," Brown continued; "the men have been growling a leetle for a week back, but when I talked reason an' sense to 'em, they allers listened to it; but this morning you might as well talk to a lot of rocks. One thing, though, may have set 'em up to this hyer piece of work: they know that there's a special agent from the company in town."

A peculiar look came over Talbot's face.

"Do you think that he has had anything to do with instigating the affair?"

"Well, I'll be hanged if I know," replied Brown, bluntly. "I don't really see what he could make by any such trick; but what struck me was that the men, hearing that there was a special agent from the company here, might jump at the notion that he had brought money with him, an' if they struck an' acted ugly, he might be induced to shell out."

"That is probable," Dick admitted. "I'll go and have a talk with them, and see if I can get at the bottom of the matter. How many are concerned in the strike?"

"The hull crowd except O'Rourke and the two Chinamen."

Talbot drained off his cup of coffee, thrust his revolvers into his belt, placed his little derringers, one in each of the lower pockets of the loose sack coat that he wore, kissed his wife, bade her take good care of herself, and then followed Brown into the open air.

Talbot's house was a little, one-story shanty, divided into two rooms, and occupied a corner of the inclosure that surrounded the Cinnabar mine.

"You're prepared for work, I see," Brown said, glancing at the belt that girded in Dick's supple waist.

"Yes; experience has taught me that the best way to avoid a quarrel is to be prepared for one. O'Rourke!"

The Irishman, who was, as usual, smoking his short, black pipe by the doorway, came in answer to Talbot's call.

"You saw that gentleman that was here yesterday, Mr. Congleton?"

"The stout gentleman that was well dressed?"

"Yes."

"Shure an' I did."

"Run round town and see if you can find him. Tell him that Mr. Talbot would like to see him immediately. You'll probably find him at Hughes's hotel."

"Yes, sur," and O'Rourke started.

Ten steps beyond the inclosure, the superintendent and foreman met the strikers in procession, marching toward the mine.

The news of the trouble had spread rapidly around

town, and the consequence was that every idler in the city had rushed to the spot, expecting to see some "fun;" so the original eighteen strikers had been augmented into quite a crowd.

Perceiving the procession, Talbot and Brown halted. The strikers and their followers also stopped. Then from the ranks of the crowd Yankee Jim stepped forward. It was evident that he intended to act as spokesman for the rest.

"Mr. Superintendent, I represent this hyer delegation of workin' men," Yankee said; "we come right straight up as honest, square men should, for to complain of the way in which we have been treated."

"I'm ready to listen to any complaints, and to give you all the redress in my power," Talbot replied. "Go ahead; what's the trouble?"

"We want the dust that's due us; two weeks' wages anyway, afore we do another stroke of work."

"Now we want to talk this matter over calmly," said Talbot, quiet and cool. "As superintendent of the Cinnabar works, I am perfectly aware that there is two weeks' pay due you from the company. I can only say that there is no money in the treasury to speak of, but if you will only be patient, attend to your duties, and so let the stamps go to work, by the end of the week I shall probably be able—even if I do not receive any money from head-quarters—to get an advance upon our product for the week, and pay you a large proportion of the money due."

"That don't suit us!" exclaimed Yankee: "we want our money now or a show for it. If we had the regular officers of law hyer, we could attach the works for our money; and as we haven't, we propose to take the law into our own hands, an' we say nary stamp will go to work till we get our dust."

Talbot saw at once that another mind than Yankee Jim's had conceived this idea, and he was at a loss to imagine who was at the bottom of the affair.

"Well, men, I can't say anything more; I am but the agent of the company; I haven't got the money, and I can't pay you until I do get it; but, let me assure you, that the quickest way to get your money is to let the works go on."

And just at this moment Talbot caught sight of Congleton approaching, piloted by O'Rourke.

"Men, here is Mr. Congleton; he's a special agent of the company; listen to him and he can tell you exactly how affairs stand."

Then as the speculator came up, Talbot explained to him what was the matter.

Congleton made a speech to the men. It was very short and extremely unsatisfactory. He merely said that the directors were not very well pleased with the way affairs had gone, but he had no doubt that, upon his representing matters in their proper light, some satisfactory arrangement could be made.

After this speech, the strikers held a short consultation among themselves, and then Yankee Jim stepped again to the front.

"My mates an' I will agree to one thing. If Mister Talbot and Brown will resign their places, and deliver up the works, an' money, an' goods to Mister Congleton hyer, an' he will make a fair division of what money thar is, we'll go to work ag'in."

An earthquake ripping the ground open at his feet could hardly have astonished Talbot more. For the first time the nature of the demonstration occurred to him. His first thought was correct, too; there were wiser heads than Yankee Jim's at the back of the movement.

"In my capacity of special agent for the Cinnabar company I cannot perceive any objections to your plan," Congleton said; "and I've no doubt that both the superintendent and foreman will see the force of your remarks, and resign their positions immediately."

CHAPTER XXII.

TALBOT SHOWS FIGHT.

A FLASH of fire blazed from Dick's dark eyes as he listened to the ultimatum of the strikers. The oily words of Congleton, too, did not tend to lessen the angry passions that were burning within the heart of the superintendent.

"Resign my position, eh?" Talbot said, very quietly; but to those who knew him well, it was evident that it was only by a great effort that he retained his composure.

"That's whar we stick," replied Yankee Jim, insolently. "We kinder think that the consarn would run better with a fresh man to the fore; in course, meanin' no offense to you, Mister Talbot."

But there was offense in the man's manner. If not in his words.

"As special agent of the company, Mr. Talbot, I would really recommend you to adopt the plan suggested by these gentlemen, since that seems to be the only way to settle this difficulty," the special agent remarked.

Talbot paid no attention whatever to Congleton.

"Unless you get your money you and the rest will not work," directly addressing Yankee Jim.

"That's the p'int!" the bully replied, insolently; "not only that, but you can jes' chalk it up that nary other man will do a lick of work on this hyer mine till we gets what's comin' to us."

Dick's lips quivered, but with a powerful effort he restrained himself.

"Now, just listen to me, men," the superintendent said, in low, deep tones. "In the first place any talk of my resigning my position in this mine is wasted. I don't recognize the right of any man in the employ of the Cinnabar Company to dictate to that company how they shall carry on their business. You have a perfect right to strike, if it so pleases you; that is your privilege. Now, to come right down to plain talk; is there any personal matter at the bottom of this demand that I shall resign my position? Is there any man among you that has a grudge against me? or any two men, or three men, or five men, or more? If so, I'm 'heeled,' and I reckon you all are. Draw your weapons, then, any one, three, five, or more, and step right out where we'll be clear of this crowd of fellow-citizens, and we'll settle it! If I've wronged any man, I'm not afraid to give him a chance to get square!"

Talbot had been gradually getting excited, and his voice had swelled from its low tone into the loud, clear, bugle-blast of defiance.

When he had warned them that he was "heeled," to use the mining parlance, he had swung back the

skirts of his coat, and showed the revolvers belted to his side.

Not one of the crowd made a motion as if to accept the bold defiance, but five or six in the outer circles of the throng took a step or two backward, and cast their eyes quietly around, as if for the purpose of ascertaining the position of the nearest shelter, from which they might have a view of the coming "circus," and yet be out of the reach of harm.

Yankee Jim understood the nature of the challenge to be principally meant for him; but, anxious as he was to get even with Talbot, he had no idea of risking his precious carcass in a fair fight with, notoriously, one of the best shots in California.

"Come, come, fellow-citizens!" cried Dick, impatiently; "my money's up; who 'calls' me?"

There was a moment of silence, and then a hoarse voice of a huge blue-shirted miner, on the extreme edge of the crowd, cried:

"I reckon we all 'pass, pard'!"

There was a general laugh at this sally.

Comedy and tragedy go ever hand in hand on the border.

"All right!" cried Talbot, after the laughter had ceased; "if no one cares to 'chip in,' I'm agreeable. All I want is to have the matter understood. If I have wronged any man, he needn't go 'hunting' me round town; I'm always ready to step up to the captain's office and settle. Now, fellow-citizens, we'll fix one point, certain: I don't go out of the Cinnabar mine until I am carried out, feet first!"

"Bully for D. Talbot, Esquire!" sung out a discordant voice from the center of the crowd.

Dick recognized in the speaker the bummer who had called himself Joe Bowers.

"Now for the next question before the meeting," Talbot continued, without taking any notice of the interruption. "There are two weeks' pay due to you Cinnabar men. I ask you to wait until to-morrow morning. At nine o'clock to-morrow you shall have every cent that's due you. I give you my word of honor upon it, and I reckon there isn't a man in this crowd can say that he ever knew Dick Talbot to go back on his word. Will this satisfy you?"

"Course it does, old pard! Bully for Talbot! Right, ole man, every time, for ducats!" yelled Mr. Joe Bowers, in wild enthusiasm, much to the astonishment of the miners, to whom the tattered and weather-beaten bummer was a stranger.

"Wot do you know 'bout it?" growled a compatriot of Yankee Jim's, looking askance at the ragged fellow.

"Ole pards, you know," explained Mr. Bowers; "went to school with him!" and then he pretended to catch sight of the face of the miner for the first time.

"Why, ole fel', is it you? Give us your fist! I ain't seen you since that time in Skinner's Flat!"

The miner was about to indignantly repudiate all knowledge of Mr. Joe Bowers, but Talbot, speaking, attracted his attention.

"As I don't hear anything against it, I suppose my proposal satisfies you."

"Yes, yes—that's fair!" came in murmurs from the crowd.

Yankee Jim, the former spokesman of the strikers, was silent. The sudden turn of affairs bothered him, and he was at a loss what to say. The miners seemed disposed to accept Talbot's offer, and he guessed that it would be of little use for him to attempt to turn the current which had set so strongly. He looked at Congleton as though he expected in the face of the speculator to read some instructions, but the special agent was quite at sea what to do himself. Talbot's confident assurance bewildered him.

"To-morrow at nine o'clock, your money will be ready for you," Talbot said, apparently ending the matter. But as Talbot spoke, a sudden idea occurred to Congleton. He thought he had surmised where the superintendent was going to raise the money, and he resolved to put "a spoke in his wheel," as he would have expressed it had he put his thoughts into words.

"Gentlemen, a parting word!" Congleton exclaimed, appealing to the crowd who were already moving away. The words stopped the dispersion.

The worthy superintendent of the Cinnabar mine has just assured you that you shall receive the wages due for the past two weeks to-morrow morning. I confess that I haven't the remotest idea where he is going to raise the amount, for twelve hundred dollars, more or less, don't grow on every bush in this hyer region, nor does it walk round in many men's pockets. I reckon that I don't often take a back-seat in financial matters, but it has just beat me to raise money for this hyer consarn. Why, gentlemen, thar's nigh onto ten thousand dollars' worth of new machinery for the Cinnabar mine stuck on the road from San Francisco hyer, jest because the company can't raise the money to fetch it along. Why, gents, thar's a mortgage on every piece of wood, iron or rock belonging to this hyer Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company! Why, gents, if any liberal man was disposed to lend me a hundred dollars on any security that I could give him in my capacity of special agent for the Cinnabar Company—that is, I mean, on any security belonging to the company, he'd never git nary cent of that money back ag'in, 'cos it's all covered now, the property with mortgages almost enough to kiver the hull durned mine with a paper carpet. I speaks right out plain as an honest man should. I want you to have your money, you that have worked for it, I'd like to borrow some dust from some of you fellers that are running paying mines, but I ain't a-going to lie to you about the security, 'cos the man that would do that is a villain, fellow-citizens, and I'm jest that sort of a plain man that would tell him so, right to his teeth. I rally differ with Mr. Superintendent hyer. I think it would be better to clean the hull thing out and start fresh. But he's going to run the machine now, an' I wish him luck. I reckon he'll need all the good wishes he kin git. I respect his pluck an' I'd like to help him pull through, but not even to save the Cinnabar Company would I take any man's money on worthless security."

This peculiar speech from the blunt and "honest" Congleton of course had due effect.

If Talbot had hoped to borrow any money on the strength of the Cinnabar Company, that idea was done for.

It was doubtful if the superintendent could have raised ten dollars.

"Don't wrong yourself, Mister Special Agent," the superintendent said, in icy tones; "as you have just remarked, I'm running the machine, and if the Cinnabar Company is broke, I reckon Dick Talbot ain't. And when it comes down to mortgages, there's some shanties on the Cinnabar property, on which I hold a builder's lien, which no mortgage can worry." And after this remark the assemblage dispersed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GAME TO THE BACKBONE.

THE miners slowly sauntered away, the crowd breaking up into little groups, all intent upon discovering where and how the superintendent was going to raise the money necessary to pay off the labor debts of the Cinnabar Company.

Many were the surmises and vague the conjectures.

"He'll do it, boys, for rocks!" ejaculated Mr. Bowers, who had managed to introduce himself into the center of the strikers, who were clustered around Yankee Jim. "I've know'd Dick Talbot ever since he was knee-high to a chaw tobacco. He's jes' all lightnin' every time. You'll git yer money, pards, I'll bet ten dollars on it!"

This declaration, and Mr. Bowers's willingness to back up his words with the solid stuff, had due weight upon the minds of the workmen. They crowded quite eagerly around the bummer, but Yankee Jim looked daggers at the free and easy stranger.

"It's all O. K.," repeated Mr. Bowers, with a dignified wave of his dirty paw. "I tell yez what it is, pards, Talbot's a good squar' man, and he's worth a heap o' dust. I kin remember 'im in 'fifty-four, down in Pig-tail Gulch, when he jes' run the town. He's all right now, I tell you!"

Yankee Jim didn't wait to hear any more; but walked off with a muttered curse, while the curious miners endeavored to extract from the redoubtable Mr. Bowers all he knew concerning the superintendent of the Cinnabar mine, and as that worthy possessed a remarkable power of invention, he satisfied the curiosity he had excited with some of the most wonderful yarns that had ever been heard. And as the whole party adjourned every now and then to a saloon to "liquor-up," within an hour or so it would have puzzled a conjurer to decide which was the must drunken one of the throng. It is hardly necessary to remark that Mr. Bowers did not drink at his own expense; but the credulous miners footed the bill.

Talbot walked slowly toward the mouth of the shaft; Brown followed a few steps behind him.

The superintendent sat down on an overturned wheelbarrow, and taking out a little pearl-handled pocket-knife, proceeded to trim his nails.

Brown squatted down upon a chunk of rock, and drawing forth the huge jack-knife which he always carried, picked up a chip from the ground and commenced to whittle. This action indicated that the stalwart foreman was deep in thought.

"What do you think about it?" asked Talbot, suddenly, suspending operations on his nails, and addressing Brown.

"Reg'lar old p'ison!" replied the foreman, emphatically, whittling off a huge slice from the chip.

"You think that some one has incited the men to strike?"

"Co-rect!" exclaimed Brown, "and the first letter of his name is this durned scamp, Congleton."

"Just my own thought," said Talbot in his quiet way.

"Plain as the nose on my face!" cried Brown, getting violent in his honest indignation.

"When I saw this Yankee Jim at the head of the men I had an idea that he had excited them to strike, because I know that the fellow hates me; but I soon understood that he was only the tool, not the master. What do you make of it, Mr. Brown, anyway?"

The foreman whittled away for a few minutes in silence. He was evidently debating the question in his mind.

"Well," he said, at length, "I can't exactly reason the thing out, but I reckon I kin give a pritty good guess at it. This durned special agent is at the bottom of the hull thing. He's the man that found the brains in the affair. I don't exactly see what he's drivin' at, 'cept that he wants to get you and I out of this ranch. P'haps his idea is, that he'll git some other men in he'll be able to 'use, and I reckon by this time he understands that he can't perform that little operation with us."

"But how, in so short a time, could he have possibly come to an understanding with Yankee Jim?" Talbot asked, his gaze bent upon the ground.

"I reckon Kentuck, the gambler, could answer that question," Brown replied. "Mebbe I wouldn't have thought of it, but I see'd Congleton coming out of Kentuck's place last night, an' that looks mighty suspicious, pard."

A cold, hard look came on Dick's face, and he thrust the slender blade of the penknife deep into the wood of the barrow. Brown watched him, a curious expression upon his face.

"What are you thinkin' of, eh?"

"If these two men are in league against me, it's a lucky thing for them that I've got a wife here," Talbot replied, slowly.

"What would you do, Dick, if the wife wasn't here?" Brown asked.

"First convince myself that my suspicions were true, and then send these two men where gold wouldn't be of much use to them," Talbot replied, a lurid light blazing from his eyes.

"It may come to that before we are through," Brown suggested.

"I will keep it off as long as I can, for her sake," Dick said, slowly. "She is not well; I can see it in her face, although she makes no complaints. It's strange that all through my life fate seems to take pleasure in forcing me into scenes of bloodshed. But this time I will not seek the quarrel!"

"But if you can't avoid it? If it's forced right straight onto you?" Brown questioned.

"Well, in that case I reckon that the Cinnabar Mining Company will need another special agent, and that there'll be one gambler less in Cinnabar City."

Talbot's tone was quiet and cold, but there was a look in his eyes which plainly revealed the angry passions that burned within his heart.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Brown, emphatically. "Jes' count me in, Dick; I'll back yez, teeth and toenails. Never give up the mine! It's ours! We fit the McClouds for it, and walloped the red snakes right out of their boots! But I say, Dick, one thing gits me: whar in the name of creation, are you goin' to raise money to pay the hands?"

Talbot laughed.

"That bothers you, eh?"

"Well, now, it jes' does," Brown replied. "I thought when you made the speech to the boys that they should have their money to-morrow, you intended to try an' raise a loan 'round town, pledge the machinery an' tools, mebbe, but that special agent jes' knocked fits out of that idee with that speech of his'n."

"That is exactly what he intended to do," Talbot said. "That is why he spoke. He wanted to prevent me from raising money on the Company's property, even supposing that any man with money was fool enough to think that, as superintendent of the mine, I had power to put in peril the property of the Company."

"Then that wasn't the idee?"

"No; I knew when I assured the men that they should have their money, that I couldn't raise it upon any security that I could offer."

"Then how in thunder air you goin' to git it?"

Brown's curiosity was strongly excited.

"Make a raid on the enemy's supplies," Dick replied, with a baffling smile.

"Well, I reckon I don't understand," Brown said, slowly.

"You think that Congleton and Co. is at the bottom of this trouble among the hands?" Talbot demanded.

"Sartin!"

"If I pay the hands what is due them to-morrow it will be a triumph for me?"

"You bet!"

"Suppose I force the party who caused the trouble to advance me the money to allay it?"

"I reckon that is nigh onto impossibility," Brown said, slowly.

"It would be a double triumph for me, though, would it not, if I succeed in doing so?"

"I reckon that it would, Christopher Columbus!" ejaculated Brown, excitedly.

"Now, you know my little game," Talbot said, rising as he spoke, closing up the penknife and returning it to his pocket.

"But can you work it?" Brown asked, anxiously, also rising.

"I guess so," Talbot answered, quietly. "I'll try it at all events."

"But when will you know?"

"Before midnight."

"And that's a chance?"

"More than a chance!"

"Go in, then, old hoss!" cried Brown, excitedly.

"Win this first trick and the game's ours!"

"Maybe not; Congleton may have other trumps back," Talbot replied, with a laugh, as he walked out of the stockade.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN INDIAN'S FAITH.

TALBOT walked up the main street of the mining-camp which ran parallel with the river.

He passed through the scattered shanties, the south-eastern suburb of Cinnabar City, and followed up the Shasta stream toward its source in the mountains.

Onward he went with a tireless stride, evidently with some other object in view than a mere ramble.

Cinnabar City faded away in the distance and still Talbot pressed onward. The chaparral grew dense and dark, and great Shasta's ice-crowned peak loomed up clearer and clearer, its summit of virgin snow cutting the clear blue sky.

Then the thicket ended and the wall of rock which marked the entrance to Shasta's canyon, rose before the adventurer.

Talbot halted, he glanced around him to make sure that he had not mistaken the spot. No! his path was true; straight he had come to where he had parted with the Indian maid after the terrible encounter with Koo-chue and his red McClouds.

Alone, by the bank of the river, stood the white, his keen glances piercing the shrubbery around. But quick and sharp as were the eyes of Injun Dick, trained by long years, passed in perilous adventures, to read the signs of the wilderness, they were at fault now. He looked for a human but none could he see.

Then he raised his voice and spoke in the Indian tongue:

"If one of the Shasta tribe lies hid within the wood, let him come forth and hold speech with his white brother."

Scarcely had the sounds of the words died away on the air when, from the top of a scrubby oak which overhung the rushing current of the Shasta stream, a light form scrambled down the knotty trunk.

Before Talbot stood the light-red elf, clad in the garb of the wilderness and unarmed, except that a slender-bladed knife was thrust through the belt of untanned leather that girded in his supple waist.

"Ho-ya-pa (Good Dog) has waited for his white brother," said the youth, gravely.

"And his white brother has come," Talbot replied; "how long before Ho-ya-pa can bring to the person that bid him watch the tidings that the white chief waits by the swift waters?"

"Before the white chief could go to his lodges down the river and return," said the youth, quickly.

"Let my brother run swift as the deer and the white chief will wait."

Without a word, the Indian darted away, not into the canyon, but through the thicket to the south of the river.

For a few moments Talbot could hear the sound of his light footsteps, and then the noise grew fainter and fainter until it died away altogether.

Seating himself upon the trunk of a fallen tree, Talbot gave himself up to meditation. The whole of his life passed before him as he sat, silent and motionless, and listened to the strange, wild cries from bird, beast and insect which broke upon the stillness of the wilderness air.

A peculiar depression had come upon him; a depression that he could not really account for. It came not from the contest in which he was engaged,

for he had passed unscathed through too many dangers for the present difficulties to affect him. But there was a dim apprehension of coming ill-fortune that weighed like lead upon his usual buoyant spirits.

It was the old superstition of the gambler over again. A run of ill-luck was at hand; avert it, mortal could not, no matter how hard the struggle. It would run its course, do its damage and be succeeded by the brighter skies due to the *genti*, Good Fortune.

Lost in reflections; tracing his career over and over again from the day when, as Patrick Gwyne, he had struck the fatal blow in the New York porter-house which had sent him a fugitive from justice, to the wilds of the far West, down to the discovery of the Cinnabar mine.

"Will I never have done with struggle and strife?" he muttered, as the events of his past life came trooping back through his brain in regular array. "Will I never taste the peace and happiness that come from contentment and ease? Must my life be ever a struggle, and men's blood eternally stain my hands?"

Buried in reflections, sad and stern, the hour passed quickly by, but with the last minute forth from the confines of the thicket stepped the Queen of the Shastas.

So noiseless had been her approach, and so deeply had Talbot been absorbed in his reflections, that not until she stepped into the little open space was the white conscious of her presence.

Talbot rose to his feet; the Indian girl extended her hand eagerly, and as the strong fingers of the white closed around the dusky palm, a thrill of delicious pleasure quivered the form and quickened the pulse of the daughter of the wilderness.

"The white chief has sent for Yuet-a!" she cried, eagerly; "the Shasta Queen can serve the warrior who saved her from the McClouds. Let him speak! If he asks for great Shasta's top, Yuet-a's nails shall tear it down!"

"I have come to put to the proof the words you said," Talbot said, "and I will ask as freely as the pledge was given."

"Let the chief speak; Yuet-a will hold as true to her word as the sun to the earth!" the girl exclaimed, proudly, drawing her lithe figure up to its fullest height as she spoke.

Talbot took from his pocket the little lump of virgin gold which he had received from the girl in the ravine above the dark canyon.

"Does Yuet-a remember this?" he asked.

The girl inclined her head, gravely, in reply.

"You told me that there were great stores of this yellow metal safe hid in the mountain canyons."

"Yuet-a spoke truth; would the white chief have more yellow metal?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

There was a sadness apparent in the voice and manner of the girl, and Talbot guessed the reason only too well.

"Can Yuet-a give her white brother a hundred pieces?" he asked, slowly.

"Two hundred," she answered, quickly, "and that doubled if not enough."

"Two hundred be it, then," he said, "and the white chief will return the yellow metal within a moon."

The girl looked at Talbot in astonishment.

"Yuet-a does not wish the chief to bring back the gift she gives," she exclaimed, her eyes flashing. "She would cast the yellow lumps into the water. If the chief asked for her heart, her own hands would give it to him, and gladly to Yopitone would she chant her death-song!"

"Her white brother would bid the Shasta Queen live, not die," Talbot replied, gravely. "He could not bear to think of the death-song chanted by her lips. She must live to preserve her people from the white warriors."

Then a sudden thought seemed to flash over the mind of the Indian.

"The white man is a chief among his people!" she exclaimed, abruptly; "let him listen to the red queen. There are snakes in his tribe who sting him to death."

Talbot listened in astonishment.

"I do not understand," he said.

"Two white snakes have sought Heema-Nang-a, the Shasta chief. They offer the long fire-arrows to the red warriors if they will do their bidding."

"Two white men, and from Cinnabar City?"

"From the lodges down the river," the girl replied, and she pointed to where the smoke curled upward in the sky from the mining-camp.

Talbot was puzzled; he could not understand this at all.

"And they will arm the Shasta warriors and lead them against the whites?"

The girl inclined her head in assent.

Talbot could hardly believe that the girl was not mistaken.

"But I cannot understand," he persisted; "who are these men?"

"Yuet-a does not know."

"And have the red warriors accepted the offer?"

"Not yet; in four sleeps Heema-Nang-a will meet the white chiefs on Shasta's side, and then they will say what they will do, and the red chief will decide."

"And you will inform me whether the Shastas decide on peace or war?"

"Yuet-a lives only to obey the white chief," the maiden replied, simply. "If he bids her die, the Shastas would mourn their queen, for she would go straight to Yopitone's bosom."

"How soon will you return?" Talbot asked, as the girl made a motion to depart.

"When the sun seeks his lodge!"

A minute more, and Talbot stood alone in the wilderness.

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER DARK.

ONE by one the stars came out in the dark sky, and one by one the huge-bearded, red and blue-shirted and big-footed miners "dropped into" the various saloons that adorned the main street of Cinnabar City.

We say main street, because the natives termed the avenue so, but truth compels us to acknowledge that there was only one street in the "lively city" of Cinnabar.

As every third house was either a saloon or restau-

rant, or the two combined, or a gambling-den or dance-house, or both together added on, the miners did not have far to travel to dispose of their hard-earned gold-dust.

The saloons, dance-houses and gaming-dens afforded the recreation so necessary to the sons of toil. After wielding the pick or shovel all day long in the mountain gulches, or in the deep recesses of the shaft and tunnel, or straining one's back at the "sluice" or "cradle," what was more natural than to seek the well-lighted saloon, hear the news of the day, and indulge in a stimulating glass, just for the sake of good fellowship.

If a man wanted to see another man after dark in the Cinnabar region, if he was "posted," he sought his friend in the saloons rather than at the man's home.

Man is naturally a gregarious animal and "hankers" after the society of his kind.

The shanties occupied by the miners in general were not palaces, and offered few inducements to keep a man in, after dark.

Then, too, by making the rounds from one saloon to another one could hear all the gossip of the town. How Billy Snug had struck it "rich" in the Grizzly Bear region; how the Emerald lode had got the "bed-rock," and the company had "busted;" how Mexican Pete, the "Greaser" gambler, had tackled Boston Johnny's faro bank, "broke" the concern, and sent Johnny, in wrath, in search of fresh fields and pastures new.

All the news going was to be heard in the saloons of Cinnabar after nightfall.

Then, too, every other night or so there would be the fun and excitement attending a personal encounter, and the chance of stopping a stray bullet intended for another man.

The reader must not think that all the Cinnabar folks were either rogues or gamblers, for that is not the truth. Out of the three hundred citizens credited to the city and its suburbs, one could hardly have picked out twenty desperately bad characters. True, there was the wild recklessness common to the frontier, where the lines of law are not strictly drawn; but it was a good-natured roughness, and one that rarely worked harm to anybody.

The mines in and near Cinnabar were all doing well, with the single exception of the Cinnabar Company itself, undoubtedly the richest "strike" of them all; and, as a natural consequence of the gold yield being large, the miners were flush and business brisk.

Kentuck's place, The Last Chance Saloon, being the largest in town, naturally did the best business, and on the evening of which we write, both bar-room and gaming saloon were full of visitors.

The miners were gathered in little knots here and there; some drinking at the bar, others discussing the news of the day, and a few trying their luck at the faro table, where Kentuck, in his shirt-sleeves, sat, dealing the cards from a German silver box and presiding over the game universally known far and wide as "the tiger."

But a few were "bucking" the "beast," for it was only about nine o'clock, and heavy play rarely commenced before ten.

As a general rule, the miners filled themselves up pretty well with patent "benzine," before attempting to cut the claws of the king of the Indian jungle.

Kentuck, cool and impassive as an iceberg, slipped the cards from the box with as much composure as though at every turn they raked in the gold-dust for him, instead of obliging him, one-half the time at least, to "shell out" to some lucky adventurer.

True, the "game" was small; not over twenty dollars on the board at any one time; but report said that Andrew Jackson Hardin, late of the State of Kentucky, "flipped" the cards as coolly for a hundred as for one. He had the nerve, lacking which a gambler never thrives.

Kentuck, though busy in the game, watched each visitor that sauntered carelessly into the apartment. In a twinkling he would make a mental calculation, as to the probability of the visitor tempting the whims of the fickle goddess, Dame Fortune.

Quite a number in the room had evidently come there merely for the purpose of passing the time by watching the progress of the game.

Any one was free and welcome to walk into Kentuck's place, whether he played or not. The gambler himself never tempted men to play. The green cloth was there, with the cards arranged in due order. If a visitor chose to bet, well and good; if not, well and good again.

Only once in a great while would Kentuck indulge in any remarks not appertaining strictly to the conduct of the game.

If a better lost, and a "greenhorn" fresh from the mud of some gulch, or from the sand of some bar, ventured a jeer upon the result, Kentuck would quietly remark that, "perhaps the gent from Pike—" an expression of utter contempt common to Kentuck—"could do better, or maybe worse."

Of course the gent from Pike—in sporting parlance—either put up or shut up.

It was about half-past nine when the Frisco speculator, Congleton, escorted by Jimmy Hughes, the landlord of the principal hotel in town, the Dry-up Saloon, entered Kentuck's place.

Hughes was a short, thick-set man of forty-five; a keen, energetic New Yorker, from Great Gotham itself. He had a round, red-face, fringed by a bushy, yellow beard, and a bluff and hearty way with him that invariably created a favorable impression.

Hughes, upon learning that his guest was the special agent of the Cinnabar Company, instantly took upon himself the task of entertaining the Frisco gentleman in a suitable manner. So when night had approached, the landlord of the "Dry-up Saloon" had suggested that it might possibly prove interesting to Mr. Congleton to take a trip about town and see the wonders of the metropolis of Cinnabar by candlelight. Gas there was none, and oil there was not.

Mr. Congleton had accepted the invitation in the same cordial spirit in which it had been given, and the two had started.

By half-past nine they had made the rounds, and finally had fetched up at the Last Chance.

"Powerful smart man this Kentuck," Hughes observed, as they entered the bar-room. "Quite a de-

cent sort o' man, too; never gets mixed up in rows or anything of that sort. Keeps the best place of the kind in town—first chop; more money changes hands here in a night than in all the rest of the faro shebangs put together; plays a good square game, too. When I'm flush and feel like a little excitement, I run and go him ten or twenty dollars, just for the fun of the thing, you know. Kinder keeps a man's blood stirring. Will you take something?"

One peculiarity about the landlord of the Dry Up was, that he rarely finished a long speech without winding up with an invitation to imbibe. It is perhaps needless to remark that a certain class, common not only in the mining camp of Cinnabar, but to more civilized regions, were always delighted when Jimmy Hughes got fairly started in a lengthy discourse.

"Thank you; I don't mind," Congleton remarked, urbanely. He had a particular reason for wishing to be on good terms with the landlord of the principal hotel in Cinnabar City, and the prospective mayor of the young metropolis.

Foxy Greek slung a couple of glasses across the counter in the dextrous manner peculiar to the tribe bar-keeper, as the two approached.

"Give me a little extract of copper-tacks and Prussic acid," said Hughes, facetiously.

The whisky bottle was produced instantaneously.

"Burn a hole at forty feet—dead sure on rats," remarked Foxy, with a grin.

"I reckon I've got a sheet-iron stomach, and I'll h't it in," Hughes rejoined.

This delicate pleasantry tickled the miners in the room, and under cover of the "ha! ha!" Hughes and Congleton drank their liquor, paid for it, and entered the inner room, sacred to King Faro.

"That's Hughes that keeps the Dry Up," one of the miners observed, as the door closed behind that gentleman.

"Yes, he's up for mayor," remarked another. "He can corral my vote. I like a man that takes his liquor straight and doesn't spile the fluid with guzzling nasty water arter it."

CHAPTER XXVI.

JOE BOWERS AGAIN.

"This fellow is jest the king-pin of the sports around this town," Hughes remarked, as he and Congleton entered the gaming-room.

There were about a dozen around the table now, and the play had grown a little higher.

Kentuck's quick eyes noticed the two when they entered, and he favored them with a nod of recognition.

"I met this Mr. Hardin in San Francisco," Congleton hastened to say. "He told me he lived here."

"I reckon now you didn't guess what kind of a business he followed for a living?" Hughes said with a chuckle.

"Well, yes, I did get some sort of an idea from what he said to me in regard to the business he carried on here."

"Oh, of course, you could guess then; but I reckon you wouldn't if he'd kept a closed mouth."

"Perhaps not."

"I'm going to take ten dollars' worth of chips," Hughes observed, fishing out a ten-dollar gold-piece from his vest pocket. "I've got a ten here that I never expected to get. The fellow owed it to me nigh onto two months. I reckoned that he had sloped, but he turned up this morning, sed he'd made a big strike, and planked down his money like a scholar and a gentleman."

"Well, I guess that Hardin can take care of it for you, if it burns your pocket," Congleton remarked, quietly.

"I reckon that I'll make another ten outen it afore I go to my little bunk this night," responded Hughes. Then he approached the table and bought ten dollars' worth of chips.

"How's luck to-night, Hardin?" Hughes asked as he rattled the chips in his hand preparatory to betting.

"Oh, jes' so-so," the gambler answered.

"Are they breaking you?"

"I reckon a man will have to put down a heap of chips on this table to break this yere bank," Kentuck retorted.

"I'm going for you, old man!" exclaimed Hughes, with a serious air as he put two chips—two dollars—upon the green.

There was a general snicker among the gamblers around the board, at the idea of a man threatening to break the bank and beginning operations with a two-dollar bet.

But Jimmy Hughes was well known to them all, and his joke was understood.

The play went on. Gamblers lost and gamblers won. So even was the luck that it was really doubtful if the bank was ten dollars ahead on the evening's play, despite the actual percentage of advantage allowed in favor of the bank.

Hughes got ten dollars ahead, then he lost all that, and ran six dollars behind; then he picked up a little, and got even, and as, with a great flourish, he put down four chips upon the green—his favorite card—and inquired if the bank could meet the loss if the green came up the winner, the door opened and the ragged bumner who called himself Joe Bowers stalked into the room.

Dilapidated miners, intent upon risking their little all upon the turn of the card, were not at all uncommon in Kentuck's saloon, although the rate was high, and he sold no checks under a dollar. This was different from nearly all of the gambling dens of Cinnabar, where a man could stake a quarter if he had no more.

Kentuck's eyes flashed as he noticed the entrance of the bumner. The gambler, though well used to dealing with both reckless and worthless vagabonds, had taken a sudden and most unaccountable dislike to the veteran, Joe Bowers. If he had attempted to give his reason for the dislike, it would have puzzled him. But one thing was certain to his mind, he hated the very sight of the fat and ragged bumner; and with that hate there was mingled a slight feeling that seemed like apprehension. Now this was something very strange. Hardin, cool, cautious man of ice that he was, used to keep his passions under an iron rule, taught by the precarious business that he followed, to wear forever an invisible mask upon his face, was yet brave almost to rashness. It is safe to say that he never felt fear in all his life, until the face of Joe Bowers came before him. Perhaps it

was something akin to the feeling that seizes even upon the bravest man when in the thicket he places his foot upon the slimy coil of the snake. The man so situated springs back, although the reptile may be as harmless as a dried bough.

In Kentuck's mind there was a dim remembrance that he had either seen the features of the bumner before, or else a face that greatly resembled his. Where or when was a mystery, and yet, Hardin possessed a most wonderful memory.

Joe Bowers halted just inside the door, and cast a glance around as if to survey the scene.

Meeting Kentuck's eyes, he nodded to the gambler in the most familiar way.

The coolness of this proceeding so enraged Kentuck that it was only by a strong effort he refrained from rising from his seat, seizing the bumner by the neck, and kicking him into the street.

Then, to Kentuck's disgust, Joe Bowers came straight up to the table.

The green cloth was pretty well surrounded, but as Bowers approached, a stalwart miner, having "coopered" the tray to lose, and saw it turn up a winning card to his dismay, pulled his old slouch hat down over his brows and retired "cleaned out," to meditate upon the uncertainty of matters in this low world.

Bowers deftly edged himself into the place left vacant by the departed miner. And as he did so, Kentuck scowled at him across the table.

Little use was it though; a man might just as well have scowled at the moon.

"How's things, old pard?" asked Mr. Bowers, affectionately. "How are they a-workin', Andy?"

Kentuck paid no attention whatever to the remarks, and went on dealing.

"Now, ain't he jes' old lightning?" said Mr. Bowers, in what he evidently intended to be a confidential undertone, to his next neighbor, a little dapper fellow who looked like a French-Canadian. "I tell 'em all, I does, when it comes to dealin' the papers, I puts my money up on old Kentuck every time. That's so, boys! Jes' you b'lieve it!" and Bowers addressed the bystanders, who, however, paid little attention to his remarks, as nearly all were absorbed in watching the progress of the game.

The cards had run out and Kentuck was shuffling them preparatory to a fresh deal.

"How are you, pard?" ejaculated Mr. Bowers, thrusting his body half over the table so that the gamster could not avoid noticing him. "I'll bet yer I'm glad that I slid in for to see you, me noble dook! I told you I'd run in afore I left town. How's things?"

"If you want any checks, this gent will attend to you," Kentuck said, curtly, indicating his assistant.

"Now you hit me whar I live!" exclaimed Bowers, with a wink at the crowd, who rather enjoyed the words of the redoubtable bumner. "As I allers says, give me Andy Hardin for a man that allers comes right to the p'int! Say, old pard, what's the limit?" And as the bumner asked the question, he drew himself up with the air of a man who felt inclined to challenge the bank to a contest of life or death by putting down a clean thousand dollars upon a card.

"More money than you'll put up, my friend, I reckon," Hardin replied, dryly. "Just you slap down all the money you like, and I reckon the bank will meet it."

"Andy, if I don't skeer the animle with two dollars and a half, I'm your man, you bet!" cried Mr. Bowers, with great dignity.

The crowd around the table roared at this rejoinder; and Bowers opened his big mouth in a grin and winked at the players in triumph.

"Say! I don't want your money!" Kentuck cried, abruptly. "I reckon that you'll need all you've got to get out of town with."

"Gentl'men, it's evident that the bank is skeered an' wants to bluff me off!" Mr. Bowers ejaculated.

This was too much for the risibles of the crowd, and they roared outright.

"Why, gentl'men," continued Bowers, with great gravity, "my old pard, hyer, knows that I'm a jes' rollin' in money. Gentl'men, I'm a reg'lar walkin' gold mine!"

"If you want to play, why play; if not, get out!" exclaimed Kentuck, impatiently.

"Don't he jes' throw out the solid chunks of wisdom?" observed Mr. Bowers, confidently to the crowd. "Young man, jes' waltz me over five dollars' worth of chips!" and as he spoke, the bumner produced a five dollar piece from among his rags and tossed it on the table.

The chips were pushed across to Mr. Bowers; Kentuck slipped the cards in the box, the players made their "game," and the gambler was just about to deal when the door opened and Dick Talbot, followed by Brown, the foreman of the Cinnabar mine, entered the apartment.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TIGER'S JUNGLE.

Kentuck was decidedly astonished when he caught sight of Talbot and Brown. It was the first time that the superintendent and foreman of the Cinnabar Company had ever honored the Last Chance by a visit.

Joe Bowers, who happened just at that minute to be watching the face of the gambler, noticed the expression of astonishment apparent upon it, slight as it was, and turned around to see what had occasioned Kentuck's wonder.

Perceiving Talbot and Brown, a broad grin came over his dirty face, and Mr. Bowers favored the two with a friendly nod of recognition.

"How are ye, pards?" he cried, in salutation; "are you goin' to gambol a leetle on the green? Jes' slide up hyer an' see me clean out this hyer bank. The original Joe Bowers is jes' the galoot that can cut the claws of this animle. Andy, old pard, I'll go you a dollar on the Jack!"

Bowers's speech attracted general attention to the new-comers, and one and all turned about to see who had entered the apartment.

The sight of Talbot and Brown excited considerable astonishment in the minds of the gamblers who happened to be well acquainted with the two.

Both of them were known to be opposed to gaming and drinking, and it was well known, too, that they had used all the means in their power to keep the hands under their control away from such places as the Last Chance. Quite a number of the men in the

room knew, too, that the best of feeling did not exist between Kentuck the Sport, and the superintendent of the Cinnabar mine, and their first thought was that there was going to be a difficulty.

Some such idea, too, had occurred to Congleton when he had looked around and discovered that Talbot was in the room; but the face of the superintendent showed no signs of passion.

Talbot and Brown sauntered carelessly up to the table as if they had merely strolled in out of curiosity.

Kentuck did not feel over and above easy in his mind when he discovered his unexpected visitors.

He had a dim foreboding that it was no mere curiosity that had prompted Talbot to walk into the tiger's den, and that his errand was one of mischief.

At the first sight of Talbot, Kentuck had quietly thrust his left hand underneath the table. In the place where a small drawer should have been was a little shelf, and on the shelf were two revolvers, loaded, capped and the hammers drawn back ready for action; a sharp-pointed, keen-edged eight-inch bowie-knife kept the revolvers company.

Although Kentuck had examined his weapons and placed them in their usual place before he opened the game that night, yet a sort of a wish to be sure that they were all right had come into his mind when he saw Talbot enter the room.

Congleton nodded in the most friendly manner to the superintendent and foreman as they approached the table, but their salutation on the contrary was cool in the extreme.

Both Talbot and Brown despised the speculator and neither of them were men who took much pains to conceal their real sentiments.

The game proceeded. The new-comers stood quietly and looked on.

Within the short space of a half an hour, it became perfectly apparent, not only to Kentuck, but to nearly all the bystanders, that the ragged bum, Joe Bowers, knew a thing or two in regard to the game of faro. It was quite certain to the experienced gamblers that Bowers knew exactly when the odds were most favorable to the bank and when to the player. Then, too, he had an ugly way of staking his money, which was very annoying to the dealer, as it insinuated that the game was not a fair one. If one of the players made a heavy bet, say from twenty-five to fifty dollars, upon a certain card to win, Bowers would invariably back the card to lose. Of course, if the game had not been a fair one and the dealer had complete mastery over the cards, and could either make a card to win or lose at his pleasure, naturally he would try to win the heavy stake by making the backed card lose, and as Bowers had backed it to lose, he of course would win.

Then, too, it was very plain that Bowers was posted as to the doctrine of chances, and played not by mere whim, as did nearly all the gamblers, but by regular scientific rules. Thus if the king had three times come up a losing card, the odds were greatly in favor of the fourth king winning, and upon this would Bowers bet.

Playing in this skillful manner, and being aided, too, by luck, for the cards seemed to run in his favor, within half an hour, Mr. Bowers had increased his pile of five chips to twenty or more. Then he became very cautious in his play. It was evident that he began to be afraid that his luck would turn. He made four or five small bets, increased his pile of chips to twenty-five, and then with a lordly air shoved the pile of ivory over to the cashier.

"Young man, jes' cash up; I reckon I won't rob the bank any more to-night," Mr. Bowers remarked, thoughtfully. By this time, Talbot and Brown had secured a position right at the back of Bowers. Happening to look around the bum noticed them.

"How are ye again, pard?" Bowers exclaimed, in his usual affable manner. "Goin' to play, Richard, ole fellow? Lend you five if you want it. I reckon my chips are heap big luck, as a Digger Indian would remark."

"Well, since you are so kind, I don't mind if I do take five of your checks," Talbot replied, in his cool, quiet way.

The original Joe Bowers was a little taken aback by the prompt acceptance of his offer, but it was only for a second though, and then he rose quite equal to the occasion.

"Glad to 'blige, old pard!" he exclaimed, with a dignified wave of his dirty paw. "Young feller, jes' gimme four five-dollar pieces and five chips back. Whenever a friend calls on the original Joe Bowers, he's thar every time. Though I say it myself, you kin jes' put your money right on me; I'm right thar!"

Bowers received the gold-pieces and the checks, put the money in his pocket and passed the checks to Talbot. Then he made room at the table for the superintendent.

"Jes' you take my place, old pard!" he suggested; "it's jes' an old lucky place now, you kin bet. You'll win a heap." Then Mr. Bowers shook his head mournfully at Kentuck. "I'm sorry for you, Andy, but my old side-pardner hyer will clean you out for sure. I pities you, but 'tain't none of my funeral."

Kentuck's eyes flashed, but he said nothing. The game went on.

In about fifteen minutes Kentuck discovered to his astonishment that skillful as the original Joe Bowers had proved to be in the difficult task of stripping the hole from "the tiger," without being scratched by his claws, or lacerated by his teeth, he was far surpassed by the superintendent of the Cinnabar Company.

Talbot seemed to be able to read the cards right through their backs.

Three times he backed the six to win, and three times in succession the six did win. Then he backed the last six to lose, and lose it did.

Another point Talbot knew, and Kentuck was not long in ascertaining that the superintendent knew it, and that was that the chances were far more favorable to the player at the commencement of the deal than in the middle or at the end.

Talbot, like Joe Bowers, played by calculation and not by chance.

As for that worthy he was delighted at Talbot's success.

"I told you so, boys; them checks of mine were lucky checks! If any gent'lman in the room wants to speculate, I'll buy checks for 'em fur a quarter of a dollar commission."

Though the gamblers were astonished at the success of Talbot they did not care to accept the liberal offer of Mr. Joe Bowers.

Talbot's five checks had swelled into forty within half an hour. He cashed five of them and gave the money to Bowers, who affected to receive it with reluctance.

The last card of the deal had passed from the box and Kentuck was shuffling, preparatory to commencing anew.

"I'm getting tired of this," Talbot said, addressing Brown, but in so loud a tone that his words were audible to all in the room. "I might as well play for enough to make it interesting, for I seem to be in luck to-night. What's the limit to the game?"

Kentuck understood that this question meant business.

"No limit; you can bet all you like," he replied.

"Well, I intend to bet pretty high. Weigh that, will you?" Talbot laid a buck-skin bag of gold-dust upon the table.

"A thousand and twenty dollars," said the cashier, after the dust was weighed.

"Correct; that's exactly what Billy McArdle said the amount was. Well, I'll put that thousand and twenty dollars upon the six to win," and Talbot placed the bag upon the card. "We might as well do without the checks and come down to the solid stuff."

Kentuck hesitated for a moment, but his natural pluck came to his rescue.

"All right; the bank will see it; game all made, gentlemen?"

Only a few took the hint, for all were more intent upon watching the big play than to play themselves.

"Bet any gent'lman five dollars that the six wins!" cried Mr. Bowers, vigorously.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"PASS IN YOUR CHECKS!"

"I'm anybody's mutton that the six wins!" repeated Bowers, defiantly, but no one seemed inclined to take up the banter.

Congleton was decidedly astonished at the amount in possession of the superintendent. The thousand and twenty dollars so boldly risked upon the chance of a card winning or losing would almost suffice to pay off the hands of the Cinnabar Company and start the works again.

The speculator consoled himself, however, with the thought that the six might not win, and then Kentuck would "rake in" the superintendent's dust.

Not the least astonished man in the room was Brown, the foreman.

Talbot had suddenly made a raid upon Brown's quarters about nine o'clock, and suggested a walk around town. Brown had consented, nothing loth, and the two started, dropping in here and there, until at last they halted in front of the Last Chance.

Talbot remarked that he had never been in the place and proposed to take a look inside.

Brown of course assented, and the two had entered.

The foreman was considerably amazed when Talbot accepted the loan of five checks from Bowers, and had commenced playing, but it was nothing compared to his astonishment when Talbot produced the solid bag of gold-dust and coolly wagered a thousand and twenty dollars that the six would win.

Brown was so much astonished that it rendered him speechless; he could only look on in profound amazement, his eyes assuming a saucer-like appearance.

Kentuck gave a glance around the board as if to assure himself that all probable bets had been made.

Very few had "chipped" in; the big bet had "kinder" frightened off the little ones.

Slowly and deliberately Kentuck commenced to deal. It was not every night that he flipped the cards with a thousand dollars and over planked down upon the board.

There was only just a second or two of suspense, for the first winning card that came out was the six of hearts.

The bystanders drew a long breath of relief; Congleton checked a muttered curse that rose to his lips, and just a single drop of perspiration oozed out upon the forehead of Kentuck.

Talbot himself was as cool as an icicle. Brown ejaculated, "By thunder!" evidently wonderstruck, while Mr. Joe Bowers loudly demanded to know where the man was who had taken up his bet that the six would win.

Kentuck took a second look at the red-faced six of hearts, as if to assure himself that his eyes had not deceived him; then he cast a look upon the money, the capital of the bank, displayed upon the table, saw that there was only some five hundred dollars or so, and took a buck-skin bag from its resting-place on the little shelf, where the revolvers and bowie-knife reposed, counted out sixty twenty-dollar gold-pieces and shoved them across the table toward the winner.

A very long breath indeed came from the majority of the lookers-on, and many a mouth watered at the sight of the little heap of gold coins.

Talbot put down his hand, scooped up the double eagles in a little heap by the side of the bag of gold-dust, and moved the entire "concern" to the seven-spot.

"Two thousand and forty dollars that the seven wins," he said, as coolly and calmly as if the dollars were but cents.

Kentuck took a short, quick breath, and his eyes snapped as he looked upon the money piled upon the card. He hesitated. Talbot's luck had run so good that the gambler feared to accept the bold defiance.

As for the "lookers-on in Vienna," each and every one edged closer and closer up to the table, as though they feared that they would miss seeing some part of the fun. Then, too, it was not every day that the proprietor of the Last Chance could be forced to consider whether he dared to accept a banter or no.

Naturally the sympathy of the crowd was with Talbot and against the bank. Hardly a man in the little crowd, with the exception of Congleton, who wouldn't gladly have given five dollars to see the bank forced to suspend operations. Breaking a bank

was almost equal to a first-class "ruction" with revolvers and bowie-knives to the fore.

Joe Bowers was wild with delight.

"That's the ticket!" he cried, vociferously; "all down but nine—set 'em up again! I'll go twenty-five dollars that the seven-spot wins!"

And suiting the action to the word, Bowers laid down twenty-five dollars by the side of Talbot's bet.

A few others of the gamblers, carried away by the belief that Talbot's luck would land him a winner, followed the example of Mr. Joe Bowers, and deposited small sums upon the board, each and all wagering that the seven-spot would win.

"Go fur it, boys!" suggested Bowers; "thar's luck in odd numbers! My old pard hyer is dead sure to win. Gentlemen, I disremember ever seein' him break at this 'ere game. Andy, I'm sorry fur you, but I reckon that you hev' to quit arter this round."

"You'd better keep your jaw to yourself!" Hardin retorted, angrily. "You won't bu'st the concern, anyway!"

"I'm goin' to help, ole man!" said Mr. Bowers, with a grin. "I'll take twenty-five 'checks' outen you!"

Kentuck was undecided. There was now a little over twenty-one hundred dollars on the board, and each and every dollar laid that the seven would win. Talbot had been unusually lucky; there was a chance that his good fortune might desert him at any moment; why not now with this heavy stake pending?

Such was the question that the gambler asked himself.

"Come; are we going to have a show, or is the bank broke?" asked Talbot, his tone just a trifle irritating to the ears of Kentuck.

"I'll go a hundred dollars that the seven loses!" exclaimed Congleton, abruptly, drawing out five double-eagles from his pocket as he spoke, and addressing Talbot. The speculator had become strangely excited. He had learned to hate Talbot, and it galled him when he saw that Kentuck hesitated to accept the bold defiance of the superintendent of the Cinnabar mine. The Frisco chap felt sure that Talbot would lose, and he wanted to spur the gambler on to accepting the wager.

"I'm your man, sir!" Talbot replied, quickly, and he drew a buck-skin bag from his pocket, which bore Billy McArdle's signature and a hundred dollar mark. "Just weigh that, Johnny!" and he tossed the bag to the cashier, who instantly transferred it to the scales.

We have before neglected to mention that a pair of scales to weigh gold-dust forms a highly-useful part of the equipment of every gaming-saloon in the mining region.

"Co-rect!" said the cashier, tersely.

"I'll stake you another hundred that the seven loses!" exclaimed Congleton, hotly, showing out a handful of money.

"Done!" cried Talbot, producing another little bag. "Now I'll bet you a hundred more, or two hundred, or five hundred, or a thousand, or as much money as you choose to put down on the table! shell it right out! I'll cover it!"

After this Mr. Bowers could restrain himself no longer.

"Old man, I don't mind if I go you twenty-five dollars!" he howled, shaking his dirty fist in Congleton's face.

The excitement was now at its height.

"I'll bet yer five dollars, rocks!" yelled a gaunt miner, who didn't look as if he had five cents in the world.

"I'll go you ten!" shouted another.

"Two dollars and a half that the seven wins!" bellowed Long Tom Merigan, the gentleman from Pike, making a frantic rush at the speculator.

And in a second Congleton was surrounded by an eager, and to tell the truth, a dirty crowd, all clamorous to back Talbot's bet.

The man from Frisco perceived at once that he was not so expert in the game of bluff as he had imagined.

"I reckon I'm satisfied with the two hundred bet," he said, in confusion.

"Oh, go me twenty-five!" implored Mr. Bowers, pathetically.

"We haven't heard yet whether the bank will play or not," Talbot observed, quietly.

Then all of a sudden Kentuck made up his mind. At the worst it would not break him entirely. If luck ran against him, and he lost, in a week or so he would make it up again.

"The bank will play, gentlemen," he said, decidedly. "Your game made?"

Then hungry, wolfish eyes glared upon the gambler, and upon the faro lay-out and the shining box which held the cards.

Even the hand of the gamester trembled. Two men alone of the throng around the table seemed calm, and betrayed no traces of excitement. The first was Talbot, and the second, the original Joe Bowers.

So intense was the excitement that the gamesters were as still as mice, intent on nightly prey.

The play commenced; first came a six, then a queen, then a jack, then a seven—

Talbot had won.

"The bank is broke; pass in your checks, gentlemen," Kentuck said.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SERENADE.

THE lights were out in the gaming saloon of the Last Chance, although the bar-room in front was still in full blast.

The gamesters had received their winnings and departed. Of course it did not take long for the news to circulate around town that the superintendent of the Cinnabar Company had broken Kentuck's bank, and by the time that the astonishing tidings had been freely commented on for a half-hour or so, the report of Talbot's winnings had swollen all the way from five to twenty thousand dollars.

All the hands attached to the Cinnabar mine rejoiced, except the ringleader of the strikers, Yankee Jim. The hands felt sure of their money now, but Jim would rather have lost the two weeks' wages due him than see Talbot hold his position.

Some half a dozen of the Cinnabar men got together, egged on by Joe Bowers—who had given a flaming and a most elaborate account of how the

Cinnabar superintendent had pared the nails of Kentuck's tiger—and they had resolved to serenade the superintendent in first-class style. Bowers had willingly agreed to lead the singers, stating that he had once been the middle-man for a minstrel band.

Instrumental music was difficult to procure in lively Cinnabar City, and after much discussion as to certain miners known to sometimes torture unoffending instruments, some of the crowd suddenly thought of the negro who played the banjo in the Last Chance saloon.

As Bowers explained, it would be a high old joke to serenade Kentuck's conqueror with Kentuck's own musician.

The idea tickled the crowd, and a committee was instantly appointed to visit the saloon and secure the banjo-player, and as Long Tom Merigan, the "member from Pike," was at the head of the committee, and significantly remarked that he "reckoned" he could persuade the "dark" to come, or else there would be "a first-class chance for a funeral," at the same time picking his teeth with a bowie-knife a foot long at least, it was not doubted that the gentle musician would accept the pressing invitation.

Long Tom had conceived a most wonderful respect for Talbot, ever since the time when the superintendent made so free with his ear.

The committee succeeded; and, headed by the old negro and his banjo, took up the line of march for the Cinnabar works.

Naturally, the novelty of these proceedings attracted quite a little crowd. All the miners floating about the street and in the saloons hastened, when they heard the sounds of the banjo, to discover what was the meaning of the unusual noise; and when they heard the delegation express their determination to serenade Superintendent Talbot on account of his breaking Kentuck's faro-bank and winning fifty thousand dollars—it had risen to that sum by the time the procession got fairly under way—almost every one concluded to "go along." So, by the time the serenading party reached the Cinnabar mine, there were nearly fifty men marching in tolerably regular order behind the banjo-player; tolerably, we say, considering the usual condition of the Cinnabar bucks at midnight.

When the procession halted and commenced to prepare for the serenade, a slight difficulty arose. The aged negro's knowledge of tunes was limited; "Old Bob Ridley," "Virginia Rose," Nancy Till," and a few other simple airs were all that he could accomplish.

Bowers, nothing daunted, directed the "dark" to sail in on the "Virginia Rose," and pitched into:

"The mo-on is beam-ing o'er the la-ke,
Co-me, sail in me light ca-noo-oo!"

Then Mr. Bowers and the music broke down altogether.

"I kin not, gent'l'men!" the fat bummer ejaculated, in disgust; "this hyer old piccaroon ain't fit fur to play fur a blind owl fur to dance!"

"You jes' go 'way, white man! fore de Lord, I'll jes' fetch you a lick dat will make you tink dat you is sent fur an' can't come!" cried the African, rising in a rage and grasping the banjo with both hands, intent upon converting it into an offensive weapon.

Probably the singer and the musician would have come to blows, as the miners were just in the humor to enjoy the fun, had not Talbot's appearance at the door of his shanty attracted their attention.

"Thar he is!" exclaimed Bowers, in joy; "thar's my old pard, R. Talbot, Esquire! He's the man wot went into the tiger's den an' peeled the hide right off the animle, without nary scratch or turning a hair; let out, boys; yell fur him; hip, hip, hurrah!"

And the crowd took up the shout, vigorously.

"That's the man that won seventy-five thousand dollars at a lick, an' I see'd him do it!" cried Mr. Bowers.

By this time Talbot understood that this demonstration had been gotten up entirely in his honor.

"I'm very much obliged to you, gentlemen," he said, "very much flattered by this honor, but I really must request you to levant at once. My wife is very sick indeed, and the least noise disturbs her."

"Wot ails her, old pard?" asked Bowers sympathetically.

"The mountain fever," replied Talbot.

"We 'pologize, old pard," said Bowers, with great dignity, removing his tattered hat; "didn't know that thar was sickness in the family. We'll dust, you bet! An' you, you durned old banjo-player, wot do yer mean by comin' an' howlin' an' kickin' up a row when a man's wife is sick? Ain't you 'shamed of yerself?" demanded the bummer, with great dignity.

Talbot retreated into the house and closed the door behind him. Slowly the assemblage dispersed. The rough, boisterous miners, a quarter of them at least under the influence of liquor, trod as softly as though they were stepping on egg-shells as they stole away from the house wherein lay the sick woman.

As for the negro banjo-player, after Mr. Bowers's reproving words, he had not stood upon the order of his going, but vanished at once into the darkness.

"Say, what is the mountain fever, anyway?" demanded a "pilgrim" fresh from the East.

"Wot is it?" cried Mr. Bowers, who happened to be near at hand when the question was asked.

"Wot is it?" he repeated, in a tone which at once betrayed profound contempt for the ignorance of the questioner and wonder that he should be so ignorant. "Wal, I reckon a cuss that has ever once had a touch of the mountain fever will be apt to remember it. Fust you feel a pain in your head, then a gnawing in the region where you stow away your vittuals, then a cold sweat all over you. You feel as if you'd like to die, then you feel sorry that you don't. I've jes' seen a reg'lar old mountain hunter, weighin' nigh onto two hundred pounds, fetched right down in a couple of days, so that he wouldn't have stood no show in a fight with a sick tom-cat."

Then, as was usual with Mr. Bowers when almost any subject was started, he proceeded to relate a series of tales, each one more marvelous than its predecessor, of the wonderful ravages that he had seen the mountain fever inflict upon friends and acquaintances of his royal self.

Strict adherence to the truth compels us to state that, by twelve o'clock, the original Joe Bowers, Esquire, and his immediate following, were sadly

under the influence of strong liquors, and were making night hideous by executing war-dances, with splendid imitations of the war-whoop of the Indians, in front of the Last Chance saloon.

After Talbot had closed the door in the face of the delegation, he went at once to the bedside of his wife.

The dark-eyed girl who had loved Injun Dick with such a strange, peculiar passion, had changed wonderfully in a few short hours. The glorious dark eyes had sunk deep within the head; the soft cheeks were pale and hollowed by the fever that held possession of the light, fragile frame.

It needed but a single glance to tell that the woman was not long for this world.

As Bowers had truly stated, earth held not a sickness that could compare in torture with the dreaded mountain fever.

"What was it, Dick?" she asked, feebly, as Talbot resumed her seat by the bedside.

"Some of the boys wanting to give me a serenade. You remember I told you when I came in that I had broken the bank owned by this Kentuck."

"Yes, I remember," she said, slowly; "you have been successful?"

"Oh, quite successful. I have won over three thousand dollars. I shall be able to keep my promise to the hands, and settle with them in full to-morrow. I can start the works again. I have triumphed so far. You remember I told you that I thought this special agent wished to get both Brown and myself out of the Cinnabar Company, and I have a suspicion that Kentuck is in some way mixed up with Congleton."

"But you have got the best of it so far?" she asked, with strange earnestness.

"Yes," Talbot replied, astonished at her manner and a little alarmed by it. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because I had a fearful dream," she murmured, a shudder quivering her slight frame. "I dreamed that I was dead, and I seemed in a spirit form to be hovering over the earth. There came a great noise—the sound of deadly strife; I seemed to see you struggling with a host of foes, and your hands were dripping red with blood."

Quietly Talbot put his strong arms around the nervous woman, and drew her to his breast.

"Don't tremble, dear; it was only a dream," he said.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SUDDEN ATTACK.

KENTUCK and Congleton sat together in the now deserted gaming saloon. A single candle placed upon the faro-table shed a glimmering, uncertain light around.

After the gamblers had cashed their checks and departed, Hughes and Congleton, with a nod to the enraged gambler, and a "better luck next time," had followed the example of the rest and retired.

After Congleton had arrived at the hotel, he had parted from Hughes, apparently to go to bed, but in reality to return to the Last Chance and deliberate with his fellow-plotter upon the plan of action to be pursued.

The door of the gaming-room was closed and bolted, but a word to the barkeeper, communicated by him to Kentuck, caused that individual to shove back the bolt and admit the speculator.

The place, lit up only by the single candle, looked extremely desolate to Congleton when he thought of the exciting scene that had occurred within the room, and in which he had played so prominent a part.

Kentuck sat down by the table, and resting his elbow upon it, supported his cheek on his hand in a very gloomy manner.

Congleton helped himself to a seat; and as he glanced at the table where the cards were spread out in luring array, a bitter curse came to his lips as he thought of the two hundred dollars that the superintendent had "corraled."

"Did you ever see such infernal luck?" cried Kentuck, abruptly.

"Never," replied Congleton, decidedly.

"I thought that I had him foul."

"Sure things are very uncertain sometimes," the speculator observed, dryly, and he sighed. He thought of that "little" two hundred.

"It's a mystery to me where he managed to raise the dust," Kentuck said, slowly. "I understood you to say that he only had a couple of hundred."

"So he told me," Congleton replied. "He distinctly said that he was down to the bed-rock—that he and Brown had paid out all the money that they had to keep the works going."

"Well, he either lied to you, or else he made a raise out of somebody, curse him!" Kentuck exclaimed, bitterly.

"Curse him all you like, but curse me if he hasn't got the best of us! Why, he'll be able to pay the hands off with our own money, and after our getting him into the hobble, too! Hardin, we've been bent right at our own game."

"That's no news," Kentuck rejoined, gloomily. "If I hadn't been a cursed idiot, I might have known that thar was mischief afoot when I saw him come into the saloon. Why, sport, he came hyer just on purpose to break the bank. He is no greenhorn at playing faro; I saw that right at the beginning. He managed to flax you, too, on that side bet."

"Yes; I got excited. I thought that the seven would lose, and, of course, the more we won of him the better." Then a sudden idea occurred to Congleton. "Do you suppose that he has been playing 'possum' all the time—that he's got plenty of money, and that he only pretends to be short of funds?"

"What's the use of speculating about any such thing as that?" asked Kentuck, impatiently. "He's got the money now whether he had it before or not. He'll be able to start the works to-morrow, sure enough."

"Well, we must buck at him ag'in!" Congleton exclaimed, in a very decided manner. "One trick don't make a game, nor two for that matter. He's bluffed us off this time; now then for the next attack."

"Go in! I'm with you if it takes every dollar that I've got in the world, or every drop of my blood! Anything to get square for this night's work," Kentuck cried, fiercely.

"I've got it planned out nice," Congleton said, with a knowing shake of the head. "I'm special

agent of the company, and sent up here with full authority to act as the company itself. Now I propose to serve a notice on both Talbot and Brown that their services are no longer required by the Cinnabar Company, and that they will forthwith turn over to the man I shall appoint all the property in their hands belonging to the company, and render a full account of their acts since they have been in possession of the mine."

"They will laugh at such an order."

"Exactly; but there's an old saying that he laughs best who laughs last," Congleton said, shrewdly. "The legal points I make are, Talbot and Brown turned over the mine to the company in consideration of so many shares of stock and of their being appointed to the positions of superintendent and foreman of the works, at certain salaries and considerations. The title to the mine rests in the company. If the company fails to keep its agreement with Messrs. Talbot and Brown, then they have their remedy by an action at law for damages, present and prospective; but as for their attempting to wrest the right and title of the mine from the company, it can't be done!"

"Well, I don't know much about the law," Kentuck said, reflectively. "I've always tried to keep out of its reach as much as possible. It has felt for me once or twice, but I was always too quick for it."

"I reckon that I am pretty well posted in regard to legal matters," Congleton observed, with great complacency. "You see, if the company puts the two men out of their positions, they'll have an ugly case for a lawyer to take hold of. Part of the original contract will have to be kept and part broken. Besides, it costs money to carry on lawsuits. Gold can either oil the legal wheels so that they will run smooth and quickly, or clog the machine to a turtle-like rate of speed. Suppose I turn the two out? They sue the company; that keeps up a row and naturally down goes the stock; no man likes to buy a lawsuit, you know. That answers our purpose exactly. We want to 'corral' the stock at a low figure; the lawsuit is just the thing to frighten the stockholders and make 'em weaken in their grip. It will take two or three years—maybe five or more—to get any sort of a decision; for I kin make out a strong case for the company, that Talbot and Brown were not fit for their positions and wasted the company's funds; then, after the decision is finally given—for we can keep on appealing and appealing the case until we get into the Supreme Court—if Talbot and Brown beat us, we kin afford to settle with them, for I reckon by that time we kin make a million apiece out of the mine."

Kentuck saw at once how feasible was the scheme of the wily speculator. Only one objection occurred to him.

"As I said, Talbot and Brown will laugh at you when you inform them that they must give up their positions."

"Let 'em laugh!" cried Congleton.

"But what I mean is, they won't give up their positions."

"Then we'll appeal to the law to make 'em. I've been pipe-layin' already," Congleton said, with a wink. "Hughes is pretty sure to be elected mayor, particularly if we go in and work for him. I kin fix him so that he will throw the weight of the law on our side. Then, if Talbot and his gang shows fight, why we'll raise a regular army and take the mine by main force. If there should happen to be anybody killed in the row, which is mighty probable, we can make this region too hot to hold Talbot. Mind you, he ain't over and above popular now. The boys don't like his interfering in behalf of the Chinamen, the other day. There's a pint that we kin work strong against him. Oh, I tell you what we're going to h'ist Mister Talbot outen the Cinnabar mine or thar ain't any virtue in money or brains!"

"Then in the first place we must go in to elect Hughes!"

"That's the first pint!"

"Then, after the election, we'll serve the notices on the superintendent and foreman, and if they stick, call on Hughes for authority to raise a force to put 'em out."

"Exactly; we must keep the law on our side, you know!" and Congleton winked significantly at Kentuck. "You see, if they offer resistance, it will be obstructing the officers of the law in their duties, and we'll be fully justified in wiping 'em out."

"It will work!" cried Kentuck, starting to his feet, a gloomy sort of smile upon his sallow face. "I had an idea something like it, but your plan is much the best."

"What was your idea?" Congleton asked, also rising.

"Let us take a turn in the open air and I'll explain; my head is hot staying in this close room."

Kentuck led the way into the outer saloon. All the customers had departed, and Foxy was about closing up for the night.

The cool evening air, laden with balmy perfume from the pines of the mountain-side, felt refreshing. Even the two cold-hearted, revengeful plotters, with their thoughts full of malice, could not help noticing how beautiful was the night.

"This is splendid, isn't it?" exclaimed Kentuck, and as he spoke he turned his head to look up at the star-spangled sky.

The movement saved his life, for even as the last word passed the gambler's lips, the sharp crack of a revolver broke upon the stillness of the night, and the leaden slug whistled within an inch of the ear of Kentuck.

A second bullet followed the first, but not directed with near so careful an aim, for it entered the front of the house a yard or so above the gambler's head.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MYSTERY.

WITH the speed of an antelope, Kentuck darted from the moonlit street round the corner of the shanty, into the shade of the building.

He had seen the two little flashes of fire preceding the shots, and had noted that the man who had so coolly and abruptly attempted his life must be concealed in the shadow of a little tumble-down, deserted shanty, two hundred feet or so from the saloon, and situated on the other side of the street.

Congleton had followed the example of the gambler with a degree of quickness about his movements that was really wonderful.

Concealed by the shadow cast by the house, Ken-

tuck peered out, endeavoring to discover who had fired the shots.

The noise of the discharging of the weapon excited no attention whatever. The citizens of Cinnabar were too much used to the quick, sharp crack of the pistol to pay any attention to the shots we have described. Besides, it was a common custom for the miners and storekeepers to empty their weapons after dark by discharging them, that they might reload them afresh.

"Durned close work!" ejaculated Kentuck, with a shake of the head. "Did you hear that first bullet whistle? I thought my time had come!"

"Who do you suppose it is?" Congleton asked, a slight shiver passing over his stalwart frame.

"You're too much for me," Kentuck answered. "All I know about it is, that I heard the bullets whistle as they cut through the air, and that I saw the flash of the flame in the shadow of that shanty over the way."

"Do you feel sure that the shots were fired at you?" the speculator inquired. He felt a little uneasy in his mind. This being made a target of by some concealed foe was not at all to his taste.

"I reckon if I hadn't happened to cant my head up just as the cuss fired, that I would have been having a slight conversation with the old head fellow down-stairs by this time," Kentuck replied, perfectly serious.

"But, who do you suppose fired the shots?" said Congleton, who felt a little relieved by the positive opinion of the gambler that the unknown assailant had selected him as a target.

"Some man that wants to git squar' with me, I reckon, but I'll be blamed if I can guess who it is!"

"Not Talbot?"

"Oh, no!" Kentuck replied at once; "it isn't his style. This is some poor, mean shoat that's been lying in wait for me to come out. You see, he had a splendid chance to draw a bead on me when we stood talking in front of the house. As I said afore, if I hadn't lifted up my head, it would have settled me for sure. The second shot that he fired in a hurry wasn't within a foot of me."

"I can't make out any thing over there," Congleton observed, trying to pierce with his eyes the dark shadow which hung around the upper end of the tumble-down shanty opposite.

"The galoot is probably crouched down by the road. I'll see who it is, inside of five minutes, if you choose to take a hand in the game."

Now the speculator was no coward, although he was extremely desirous of keeping his well-preserved person from the possibility of harm as far as lay within his power.

"I guess you can count me in," he replied.

"The man is thar, sure," Kentuck said, in a very decided tone. "I've kept my eyes on the place, and I reckon I could have seen a rabbit if it attempted to sneak away, the moon is so bright. You're armed?"

In answer, Congleton drew a revolver—navy size—from under his coat.

"All right; now you jes' keep watch here; I'll make a circle round and take this fellow in the rear. If anybody steps out from behind that shanty over thar, you jes' jump up and cover him with your shootin'-iron."

Congleton nodded and drew back the hammer of the "navy" that he held in his hand.

Then, Kentuck glided round the back of the shanty with a step as noiseless as an Indian brave treading his wily path through a sleeping camp of foes, and disappeared in the darkness.

"Now, I must be careful that I don't make a mistake and pop over this sport," Congleton muttered. "If he and I owned the mine, I reckon that my fingers would be mighty nervous. But, as it is, I need him and I mustn't spoil my own game."

Five minutes at least Congleton watched and waited. Not even a mouse seemed to be stirring in his vicinity, although ever and anon he could hear the wild war-whoop of some drunken miner, pursuing his devious way to his shanty.

Then, all of a sudden, from the shadow of a shanty about fifty feet or so from the ambush where the concealed assassin hid, Kentuck jumped, and, cocked revolver in hand, ran toward the dilapidated ruin.

Congleton at once sprung forward and followed Kentuck's example.

At each step both the gambler and the speculator expected to see the little flash of flame and hear the sharp, quick crack of the revolver.

But both were disappointed.

When Congleton reached the shanty he found Kentuck gazing down in utter astonishment upon a man curled up on the ground fast asleep.

The man was the original Joe Bowers, and by his heavy and irregular breathing evidently much the worse for liquor.

The two were puzzled, for both had recognized the veteran bummer.

Kentuck cast a quick, sharp glance around, but there wasn't a single soul within sight.

"He's playing possum!" Kentuck cried, and he drew back his foot and booted the sleeping man with a degree of vigor that gave strong proof that the gambler was well developed in the lower limbs.

Joe Bowers woke up very suddenly, and rising to a sitting posture, remonstrated against the assault with some of the most remarkable oaths that were ever invented. Then he suddenly discovered who was his assailant.

"An' is it my old pard?" he exclaimed, in wonder. "I'll be blessed ef I didn't think I recognized the kick!"

"You infernal crazy galoot, I've a good mind to blow the hull top of your head off!" Kentuck exclaimed, in wrath, leveling his revolver threateningly at the head of the bummer.

"Hol' on—what yer 'bout?" cried Mr. Bowers, dodging the leveled muzzle in great dismay. "You wouldn't shoot a feller you know?"

"What did you fire at me for?" demanded the gambler, sternly, still keeping the revolver unpleasantly near the head of the bummer.

"Wot's that?" asked Bowers, in profound astonishment. "Who fired at you, Andy, me boy?"

"You did, you infernal scoundrel!" thundered Kentuck, in a rage, and then he lifted up his foot and booted Bowers a thundering kick.

"Hol' on! don't do that! you hurts me; 'sides, you wears out my clothes!" Mr. Bowers remonstrated.

"What made you fire those two shots at me?"

"Me fire at you?" the bummer asked.

"Yes, you, you cowardly sneak!" replied Kentuck; "what did I ever do to you?"

"Nuffin; who sed you did?" cried Bowers, indignantly. "Show me the man that says you did, old pard, an' I'll jest warm him!"

"See hyer!" cried Kentuck, sternly. "I'll give you just two minutes to tell me why you fired those shots at me, and if you don't, I'll plaster your brains all over the side of this shanty!" And as the gambler spoke, he pressed the cold muzzle of the revolver against the head of the bummer. Situated as he was, his back pressed against the house and the pistol against his forehead, Mr. Joe Bowers might be said to be in a tight place.

But the Bummer did not seem to be much alarmed; possibly he was so thoroughly soaked in liquor that he did not understand the danger that threatened him.

"Now let up, old pard," he said, in expostulation. "I ain't done nuffin to nobody. I've jes' been out with the boys, an' I felt a leetle tired an' snoozed down hyer. Look a-hyer, if you fire off that pop-gun you'll spile this hyer wall, an' blessed if I pays the damages. Andy, ole man, you bin drinkin'. You ought to know that old Joe Bowers wouldn't do nuffin to you!"

"Where's your revolver?" asked Congleton, for the first time joining in the conversation.

"Why, rocks, is that you? An' you wouldn't go me twenty-five on that seven winnin'!" and Bowers grinned with a drunken leer in the faces of the two enraged men.

"Where's the pistol?" demanded Kentuck.

"Oh, my prophetic soul, me uncle!" exclaimed Bowers. "I pawned it in Yreka; three balls, two to one you don't take out what you put in. If you don't believe me, s'arch me. I'm jes' the old original Joe Bowers!"

The two accepted the invitation, and did search him, but found no weapon.

In baffled anger, Kentuck bestowed another hearty kick upon the astonished bummer, and then with Congleton returned to his saloon.

One solution only to the mystery; the man who had fired the shots had instantly decamped, and, favored by the darkness, had managed to escape unobserved.

Bowers, after the two had departed, immediately curled himself up and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TWO WHITE SNAKES AND A RED EAGLE.

RETURN we now to the scene transpiring on the side of Shasta's snow-crowned peak, part of which we related in an early chapter of our story.

Standing within the hollow crown, the crater of the extinct volcano, Hee-ma-Nang-a (sun-man), chief of the Shasta tribe, and Yuet-a (moon), his sister, awaited the coming of the white strangers, who had promised to tell them how the invading pale-faces might be driven from the valley of the Shasta.

Slowly the strangers toiled up the steep and snowy path.

"They will soon be here," the maiden said.

"Let the daughter of the Shastas then retire and crouch among the rocks. It is not fit that the pale strangers should look upon the face of the Shasta queen," the chief commanded, gently.

Yuet-a obeyed at once.

Fifty feet from the edges of the crater was an irregular collection of huge stones, each one of which showed visible traces of the terrible fires that in the days of old had upraised the peaks of Northern California from the level plain, and had imprisoned mighty rivers within a rocky cell.

The girl disappeared behind the rocks. The chief advanced to the edge of the crater and looked down upon the whites, who were quite near at hand.

The keen eyes of the Indian noted the faces of the strangers.

"What manner of men are these who would strike like the wolves at their own brothers?" muttered the chief, contempt curling his proud lips. "The Indian would drive the bearded pale-face from the valley of his fathers, but he would do the act alone, aided only by the knowledge that his course is just, and that great Yopitone, from the crowned peak of mighty Shasta, looks down and smiles upon his cause."

A wary, lengthened glance the chief cast, and then he paced back to his former station, and waited for the whites to approach.

At last the strangers reached the level, open space, the crater of the extinct volcano, and advanced to meet the chief.

The two white men were the gambler, Hardin, and the Frisco sharp, Congleton.

Kentuck knew the chief well by sight, for Hee-ma-Nang-a had visited Cinnabar City more than once, curious to see the homes of the white invaders.

"Glad to see you, chief," Kentuck said. "You received my message?"

"Ti-am Shasta brave, told the chief of the Shasta tribe that two men would hold a talk with him," the chief replied. He spoke English quite fluently.

"Exactly; and I am the man who sent the message. Did the warrior tell the chief that perhaps his white brother would be able to advise him how to get back the valley yonder for his people again?" And Kentuck pointed as he spoke to where the distant smokes of Cinnabar City were curling up on the clear mountain air.

"The brave spoke—a Shasta has not two tongues," replied Hee-ma-Nang-a, with calm deliberation.

"Will the chief listen while his white brother talks sense?" Kentuck asked.

"The chief's ears are open."

"Let him hear then: would he like to get back the valley of the Shasta again, and drive out the white men?"

The bronzed bosom of the Indian swelled beneath its deer-skin covering as he listened to the question. His tall form straightened up, and an eagle-like glare came from his dark eyes.

"When the Shasta chief dies would he go to Yopitone's bosom, and sit forever in the light of the sacred fire?—would the hunted deer seek the lake when the big wolves are snapping at his heels? Let my white brother listen!"

The chief raised his long arm and pointed down the valley.

"Two sleeps ago the Shasta chief hid like a bear in the bushes; he looked out upon the graves of his

fathers, where all the Shasta chiefs are laid when the bow is unstrung and great Yopitone calls his children home. A white man had planted his wig-wam there. With his strange things that scratched up the earth he dug into the graves of the dead warriors of the Shasta tribe—their bones he trampled under his feet, and the skulls of the mighty warriors he gave to his papposes to play with. Hee-ma-Nang-a, the chief of the Shasta, within whose veins burns the sacred fire that Montezuma drew from the spirit-land, saw the graves of his dead warriors defiled by the hand of the pale-face, and yet he sung not the war-chant, bid not his braves paint their faces, and whet their arrows on the flinty rock; he led them not forth to kill the stranger. No, he knew that the red-man could not contend with the pale-face with his fire-arrows. The Shasta chief covered his head with ashes and wept to think how poor was his nation.

Congleton had listened to this speech in utter astonishment. His ideas of what an Indian was like had been gathered from the few miserable specimens he had seen hanging around the whisky shops in the frontier towns, or from the century-debased Southern Californian tribes, the peon slaves of the mission priests. It was the first time that he had ever encountered a mountain savage, free and uncontaminated by the withering influence of civilization:

"The chief leads many warriors; if they were armed with the fire-guns of the whites, could they not fight them then?" Kentuck questioned.

"Mebbe," the Shasta replied, laconically.

"The whites are not satisfied with the valley; they do not find as much yellow metal there as they expected. If the Indians should trouble them much they would leave the valley rather than fight for it."

"More come every day," the chief said, slowly.

"Ah, but they would not come if they knew that they would have to fight the Shastas!" Kentuck exclaimed quickly.

"Mebbe," again said the savage, sententiously.

"Now, chief, I will talk right plain to you," Kentuck said, abruptly. "If you choose, I will find fire-guns for some of your men, with powder and ball, and when you are ready I'll lead a dozen or twenty warriors, and show them where they can strike a heavy blow and get many good things almost without resistance. The attack must be made at night. The whites will follow you of course to avenge the attack; then you can select your own ground in the hills and fight 'em with all the advantage on your side. A half a dozen attacks, and the whites will clear out of the valley, and leave their goods—fire-water—houses—everything for the red-man to enjoy."

"It is good!" grunted the chief, folding his arms across his breast and looking the wily white full in the eye.

Kentuck could hardly conceal his triumph; he cast a side glance full of meaning at Congleton. In the look he meant to say, "This is by far the easiest way to dispose of superintendent Talbot."

Congleton understood him and nodded.

"The chief will take the fire-guns and fight the white man in the white man's way?" Kentuck questioned.

"My pale-face brother is wise," said the Indian, slowly, and in a tone that betrayed deep reflection. "Hee-ma-Nang-a is only a red chief, and when he was a pappose did not learn what his white brother had learned. Yopitone did not give the same head alike to his red and white children. Did the wise men of his tribe ever tell my brother the story of the fox and the beaver?"

Both Kentuck and Congleton were considerably astonished at the question, put in such a grave manner by the Indian.

"No; I think not," Kentuck replied.

"Let my brother listen," said the chief; "he will not use his ears for nothing. One day a beaver who had been driven from his tribe because he had been so foolish, sat by the edge of the Shasta and patted the bank with his tail. Then to him there came a red fox; he looked into the water and saw a fat fish with red spots upon its sides. 'Get me the fish, beaver chief,' the fox said, 'and you shall have half.' The beaver chief caught the fish; then the fox bit off his head, and ate both beaver chief and the fish."

There was a dead silence for a few minutes after the savage had recited the legend.

The whites understood that the simple red-man had penetrated their design.

"Well, chief, play the beaver for us; catch our fish and we'll agree that you shall have a fair share of the game," Kentuck said, with an appearance of great frankness.

The Shasta warrior shook his head.

"It is only the death of two men," Congleton added.

"Yes, and you can strike them unawares," Kentuck exclaimed.

"My brother would like to see two chiefs dead?"

"Yes, yes!" cried both of the whites in a breath.

"Go fight them like the eagle not like the snake!" said the warrior, proudly. "Hee-ma-Nang-a is a chief, not a squaw. If he could bite like a snake, the white braves would lose two warriors now!"

The whites half started, cast anxious glances around, and placed their hands upon the weapons in their belts.

The Indian surveyed them with a scornful smile.

"The white braves are safe," he said. "Ti-am pledged his word that they should come and go free. The chief of the Shasta will not break the word given by the meanest of his tribe."

Both the whites realized that further discussion was useless; so they turned about and descended the hill again.

Legal trickery must decide the fortunes of the Cinnabar mine after all.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.

ELECTION day was near at hand.

For a week at least previous to that all-important event, Cinnabar City had been greatly excited. Before that time very little interest had been manifested by the miners at large as to the result of the first election ever held in the young metropolis of the North. But all of a sudden, the advocates of Jimmy Hughes, the genial landlord of the Dry-Up saloon, commenced to electioneer for their candidate.

Huge posters—imported from Yreka at a great expense—appeared in conspicuous places, urging

the citizens to vote for James Hughes, Esquire, "the People's Candidate for Mayor." A mass-meeting had been gotten up, and the several speakers who had addressed the crowd, had ventilated Hughes's claim to be elected.

Congleton had spoken at the meeting. By this time the "special agent" of the Cinnabar Company had become pretty well known about town, and as the mine was working right straight on, the hands having been paid up according to agreement, and set to work—with the single exception of Yankee Jim, who had been given his walking-papers—and was reported to be doing well, naturally the Cinnabar folks looked with a great deal of respect upon the San Francisco sharp.

Congleton had "indorsed" Hughes without reserve, said that, as the representative of the heaviest mining concern in the place, he, Congleton, of course, felt a great interest in the result of the election. Mr. Hughes was a man of solid weight and independence. He ran his own machine, and as he depended upon the prosperity of the town for support, and thrived as the town thrived, he naturally would have an interest in pushing things ahead. Against the opposition candidate he wouldn't say a word; Mr. McArdle was a gentleman whom he respected, but with all due deference he thought that as the interests of Cinnabar City were made up of numerous mining concerns, not of one, he really thought that it would be better for the citizens at large, who were interested in mining, to support a candidate for Mayor who was totally independent of any mining company; and in case of a difference arising between two concerns, could decide upon the merits of the case without the suspicion of being unduly influenced in the matter.

This was a strong point, and the muttered remarks of the crowd showed that it had produced an impression upon them.

Many small mining enterprises were being carried on in and about Cinnabar, and the men concerned in them had a deadly fear that the big-bugs, as they commonly termed the regularly incorporated companies, might attempt in some underhanded manner to secure an advantage over them. Exactly how this could be carried out would have puzzled the wisest of the workers to have explained, but the fear was there nevertheless. It was the old story over again. Labor distrusted capital.

After Congleton, Kentuck rose to address the crowd.

The Last Chance was running again at full speed, only that bets were limited at the faro-table to an even hundred dollars.

"Fellow-citizens," began Kentuck, in the bluff, frank manner generally assumed by men of doubtful reputations when they want to curry favor with a mixed audience, "I'm not much of a hand at speechifying, but I reckon that I can express my feelings on this yere matter as well as the next man. I take an interest in this yere election, because I reckon that my bread and butter depends upon it. I reckon 'bout all of you know who I am and what sort of a place I keep. In my shebang a gentleman kin amuse himself when he's tired out after a hard day's work. Thar has been talk right yere in this city of Cinnabar, that sich places as mine ought to be shut up. And why, fellow-citizens? that's the question I put to you; why do some men in this yere town say that all the saloons ought to be shut up, and who are those men? Fellow-citizens, I won't mention any names. I strike no man behind his back, but I kin jest tell you, you Cinnabar folks, every man in this yere town who says the saloons ought to be shut up, will walk up to the polls and vote for Billy MacArdle for Mayor. I don't say, mind you, that Mr. MacArdle thinks so, but his supporters do, and I reckon the man that is elected will have to pay some attention to the men who elected him. Now, I tell you, fellow-citizens, why these good folks want the saloons closed up, 'cause the poor man goes to 'em, the man that works with his two hands, and has made this yere city of Cinnabar jist what it is!"

Then the crowd yelled. Kentuck had made a "ten strike."

"These sports who want to shut up the 'Last Chance,' the 'Cosmopolitan,' the 'Silver Palace,' 'Macginnis's Home,' and all the other shebangs in this yere lively town, can lay in their fire-water in jugs and barrels, but the poor man that can't afford it, he must go without!"

Then there was another yell from the crowd. The arts of the demagogue are ever the same, and the effect wonderful.

"Fellow-citizens, we all know whar Jimmy Hughes stands on this yere question. His platform is our platform; but whar—oh, whar does Billy MacArdle stand?"

Kentuck retired amid a storm of applause.

After two or three more had addressed the crowd the meeting broke up.

The platform of the Hughes party was now clearly defined.

"Free rum and no monopoly!"

Talbot and Brown held council together when they heard what prominent parts the gambler and speculator were taking in the election contest.

But the superintendent and the foreman feared that the efforts of their two enemies in behalf of the "People's Candidate," Jimmy Hughes, meant evil to them; so, after due deliberation, they decided to work for MacArdle with all their might.

Again the express brought down posters from Yreka; and a call for a meeting to further the claims of "our eminent fellow-citizen, William MacArdle, Esq.," stared every one in the face.

The night of the meeting came. Talbot, Brown, and a few other prominent men addressed the crowd, which was almost twice as large as at the Hughes meeting.

Talbot felt encouraged at first, but after a few minutes he became convinced that the Hughes party were largely in the ascendant. He saw that there was mischief ahead.

In the intervals between the speakers, there were loud calls from the crowd for MacArdle; Talbot foresaw that the call was made for no good purpose, and tried to keep MacArdle from responding to the demand, but the old Scotchman was possessed of all the proverbial obstinacy of his race, and insisted upon speaking.

He made an excellent speech, too; said that, if he was elected, he should do all in his power to promote the advancement of the town; declared that he

was in favor of "licensed" saloons, but would shut up the dens where honest men were drugged and robbed. And in regard to his being connected with a mining enterprise he appealed to the crowd as to which one could best settle a mining dispute, the man who had followed mining all his life for a living, or a "braw" judge of strong liquors.

The crowd rather enjoyed the "dig" at Hughes, and the MacArdle party began to congratulate themselves that they were gaining ground when a voice from the thick of the throng cried out:

"Are you in favor of Chinese labor?"

Talbot and Brown exchanged glances; they recognized Kentuck's voice.

MacArdle was "floored" by the directly put question. As president of the Dundee Company he had six Chinamen in his employ.

"I believe in each man settling that question for himself," he replied, after hesitating for a moment.

"Thar's fifteen heathen in the Dundee mine, now!" cried a hoarse voice in the crowd, and then a storm of hisses went up on the air.

"MacArdle's in favor of Chinamen; they're cheap!" yelled Kentuck.

Talbot and Brown knew the voice, else they would not have been able to discover the speaker, who was wedged in the center of the throng.

"That's a lie, mon!" cried MacArdle, in a rage, shaking his fist in the direction from which the voice had proceeded.

"Mr. MacArdle is *not* in favor of Chinese labor!" yelled Brown, at the top of his voice.

And just then there was a commotion in the crowd, and a very fair prospect of a general fight, for the MacArdle men were plucky and not disposed to let Hughes's friends break up the meeting.

All of a sudden the veteran bummer, Joe Bowers, was hoisted up in the air on the shoulders of Long Tom Merigan and another compatriot.

"Lemme say a word to Billy, old pard!" yelled the bummer.

The crowd hushed their noise and looked on in astonishment.

"Now, gentl'men, all I want to ask of the candidate is this, and let him answer it if he kin!" Bowers shouted. "Who killed Billy MacArdle's grandmother?"

The crowd roared; Bowers disappeared, and MacArdle, swearing in the broadest of Scotch, hurried home, followed by his friends.

The betting that night was ten to one that Hughes would be elected Mayor of Cinnabar City.

CHAPTER XXXIV. ELECTION NIGHT.

SUNDOWN had come and the long agony was over. The first Mayor that the city of Cinnabar ever possessed had been duly elected.

There was very little doubt as to the result of the election, for even to the most casual observer, it was plainly apparent that the Hughes party was largely in the ascendant.

Whisky ran as freely as water that day at nearly every saloon in town. Every shebang-keeper in Cinnabar felt that Hughes's cause was his own, and that the election of Billy MacArdle meant utter ruin to him, the aforesaid "saloonist." Therefore the potent influence of the alluring fire-water was freely used to induce voters to go for the landlord of the "Dry Up."

It did not take the election canvassers very long to count the ballots, and within an hour after the polls had closed, the result was officially announced.

Hughes was elected by a majority of a hundred and nine votes.

A good fair contest it was too.

Congleton and Kentuck, the principal managers of the Hughes "machine," saw that the triumph of their candidate was almost certain, and wisely concluded not to endanger the result by allowing their opponents any chance to contest the fairness of the election.

Possibly, never since Cinnabar City had a local habitation and a name, was there such a scene of wild hilarity as there was on the night of the election. It is safe to say that two-thirds of the inhabitants went to bed that night a great deal the worse for liquor. And the drunkenest man of them all was the orig'nal Joe Bowers.

The ridiculous accusation implied in the question that he had addressed to MacArdle on the night of the mass meeting had tickled the fancy of the miners, ever keen to enjoy a joke.

And, "Who killed Billy MacArdle's grandmother?" became a by-word around town.

There is nothing that can hurt the popularity of a public man so much as ridicule; and it is safe to say that the absurd question put by Joe Bowers—and at which MacArdle lost his temper, cost him at the least forty or fifty votes.

A due regard for the truth compels us to state that, on the night after his election, Hughes attempted to celebrate his triumph by drinking with every man that came into his hotel to congratulate him upon the important event, and the result was that, about nine o'clock, the Mayor of Cinnabar City was in such a state of joy it took three men to carry him up-stairs and put him to bed.

Probably about the only two really prominent men of the winning party who were strictly sober that night were the two who had worked hardest for Hughes's election and who expected to profit the most by that event—Congleton and Kentuck.

There was no "game" running election night at Kentuck's place, he having given due notice that such would be the case.

Kentuck was a shrewd observer. He knew that whisky would be freely dispensed and that drunken men were apt to be quarrelsome and disposed to kick up a fuss on very slight provocation. So he determined to shut up shop.

The saloon part, though, of the Last Chance, ran as usual, and was crowded with customers.

Within King Faro's dominions all was gloom and silence. The door of the gambler's private room was slightly ajar, and a ray of light coming from it and the sound of voices told that it was occupied.

Congleton and Kentuck sat in council together.

So far, they had succeeded. They had elected their man as Mayor of the city, and now they were deliberating upon the next move in the game.

"The boys are celebrating," Kentuck remarked, as he listened to the drunken yells coming from the street.

"Yes, and we'll be able to celebrate a month or two hence, I reckon," said Congleton, with an air of great satisfaction.

"When will you make a move?"

"In about a week," Congleton replied, after a moment's thought. "We must allow time for Hughes to get fairly seated in his office and put the machine in working order."

"Well, what is the programme, anyway?"

"In the first place, notify Talbot that, after due examination of circumstances appertaining to the Cinnabar mine, I feel convinced that the affairs of the company will never be as prosperous as they should be, until there is a change in the management of the works."

"You mean to suggest delicately but pointedly that he and Brown had better get out?"

"Yes, that's about the size of it," Congleton replied, reflectively.

"Do you intend for to write this or to see him?"

"Oh, see him, of course. You understand, Hardin, I'm going to wait upon Superintendent Talbot and suggest this to him as a friend desirous of acting both for his interest and for the interest of the Cinnabar Company."

"I don't think he will be able to see it in that light," Kentuck remarked, dryly.

"Possibly not," Congleton said, with a grin. "But I must manage this matter so that public opinion will believe that I am right and Talbot is wrong, when we come to the fighting part of the matter!"

"You feel that it's dead sure it will come to a fight?" Kentuck asked, abruptly.

"No mistake about it!" Congleton exclaimed, decidedly. "Why, Hardin, those two men will stick to the mine so tight that a derrick couldn't h'ist them out. You see, my game is the soft and easy one; the threats and the violence must come from the other side. As I said, I shall wait on Talbot in about a week and ventilate my views in regard to the mine. The chances are that he will get mad as thunder and order me off the property. If he does, then, as special agent of the company, I am justified in using force to obtain admission, so that I can look after the machine."

"S'pose he's wise enough to only refuse to resign, and takes no steps against you?"

"Then I'll write him a letter in the name of the company, telling him that his services are no longer required by the Cinnabar Company, and that he must instantly turn over all the property in his possession belonging to the company to me. At the same time, I'll stick up notices round town that all business appertaining to the mine will be well transacted by myself, and that Messrs. Richard Talbot and William Brown are no longer employees of the company. If he defies the notice and sticks to the mine, I shall raise a force and seize it, appealing to Hughes in his capacity of Mayor of the town to interfere to prevent any resistance on the part of the discharged superintendent and foreman."

"But you've got to have a mighty good reason to back up all this," Kentuck observed, shrewdly. "Not a legal reason; I mean one that will satisfy the people of the city at large."

"I shall allege mismanagement of the affairs of the mine and resistance to my authority, I being special agent of the company and invested with supreme power."

"I can fix a better reason than that!" cried Kentuck, suddenly.

"Spit it out," remarked Congleton.

"What do you s'pose had more to do with the election of Jimmy Hughes than anything else?" queried the gambler.

"The liquor men backing him," answered Congleton, promptly.

"Well, that helped; but I tell you, rocks, the main point was the Chinaman question. White men don't like the yellow heathen that work for nothing and get fat on half of that. No, sir-ee! I tell you, sport, the suspicion that Billy MacArdle believes in hiring the Johns had more to do with his defeat than anything else. Why, I heard a dozen say to-day, right out on the street—'Old Billy's a good little man, but I don't vote for any man that hires Chinamen an' takes the bread out of decent white men's mouths.' That's jest what they said, and that's jest what flax-ed MacArdle."

"What has that got to do with h'isting our men out of the Cinnabar?" Congleton questioned.

"Thar's two heathen working in the mine now. Some of the men went for 'em the other day and Talbot interfered, pretty near killed one man, too, I heered, in the fuss. Now the game is to get up a strike among the boys working for the Cinnabar Company, ag'in' the two Johns. Let 'em throw down their tools and swar that they won't do another lick of work unless the heathen are kicked out."

"Talbot may yield to the demand," suggested Congleton.

"Now that ain't likely, or not fur a while, anyway. He'll be obstinate long enough for us to fix him. Jest as soon as the strike gets under good headway, you kin interfere—say that the company never authorized the superintendent to work any Johns on the mine—that you believe in free white labor and won't see the clean white article trodden down by any yaller heathen, and that you will instantly remove the superintendent and foreman, kick out the Chinamen and put back the boys on increased wages. Jest work it that way and I'd like to see the man, white, red or yaller, that kin stop it. The boys have got their blood up about this Chinaman business and they're jest a-going to clean out the heathen on the first fair chance."

It did not take long for the speculator to perceive how true were Kentuck's words.

CHAPTER XXXV. A ROUND ROBIN.

JUST seven days since Cinnabar City had celebrated the election of its first Mayor.

And in those seven days very little had happened, to outward seeming, to affect the characters of our story.

The yield from the Cinnabar mine was increasing day by day; Talbot and Brown were in excellent spirits, except that the former was worried about the continued sickness of his wife. She was apparently no better, and yet could not be said to be worse.

Congleton had been unusually civil toward the superintendent and the foreman, and they, on their

part, while responding very cautiously to his advances had about come to the conclusion that they should have no more trouble with him.

One thing, only, annoyed Brown, and that was, that the discharged hand, Yankee Jim, was constantly lurking around the mine.

Four or five days at least, during the noon hour, Brown had detected Jim in earnest conversation with the hands. He couldn't imagine what the fellow was up to, but he felt pretty sure that Jim came to the mine for no good purpose. Brown had not mentioned the matter to Talbot, preferring not to trouble him until there was some good proof that Jim was planning mischief.

Brown, however, did not discover anything to speak of, until, after the noon hour on the seventh day from the election, the men, instead of going to work, formed in a body and marched to the superintendent's office.

Talbot and Brown were enjoying a pipe just outside the shanty, which was dignified by the title of office. They had selected two masses of rocks that had come from the mouth of the tunnel for seats, and were having a cosy chat together concerning what they would do when they had made a fortune out of the mine and had retired from active business to enjoy it.

The sight of the workmen marching up in a body rather astonished them.

"Somethin's broke!" Brown exclaimed, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"Looks like it," Talbot replied, shortly.

The workmen arrived within ten feet, halted, and one of them—a thick-set son of Indiana, known as Jake Shaw—stepped forward from the rest and presented a paper to Talbot.

Both the superintendent and the foreman had risen to receive the men, as it was very evident from the manner of their approach that they came upon some unusual errand.

The paper was one of the kind usually termed a "round robin," from the fact that the names of the signers were written in a circle, so that no one name headed the list of signatures, but all were on an equality. No one, by looking at the paper, could have told which name was signed first.

The paper read as follows:

"We, the undersigned, workmen in the employ of the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company, respectfully protest against the employment of Chinese laborers upon the works of the aforesaid mine, as being contrary to the dignity and spirit of free republican institutions which were instituted for the benefit of free white men and not for uncivilized heathens, the off-scourings of a foreign country.

"And we hereby declare that the employment of Chinamen is something that we, as free and independent citizens of a great and glorious republic, cannot look upon without seeing that by such employment the free white workingman is degraded and his manhood soiled.

"And we have resolved that we cannot longer permit the ignorant and heathen Chinese to take the bread out of the mouths of our wives and children, and we hereby declare that we, as free white men, protest against the starvation laborers employed by the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company, and that until the said heathen are cleaned out, we cannot work for the aforesaid company."

Then followed the names of all the workmen attached to the Cinnabar mine, written in a circle, as we have described.

Talbot read this document aloud for the edification of Brown.

"Well, fellow-citizens," Talbot said, in his quiet way, after he had finished reading the "round robin," "it seems to me that you have taken a great many words to express one idea. You might have said right out that you don't like the Johns and wouldn't work with them. Well, boys," and Talbot's voice was as gentle and as soothing as a mother caressing her little one, "I don't think much of the Johns myself. Let me see, the two I've got here are both cooks, washerwomen, and, in fact, handy at anything of that sort. They get two dollars a day and found. Which two of you crowd will take their places at five dollars a day?"

Not a soul stirred, but the workmen looked at each other, a little puzzled by this offer.

"Come, don't all speak at once," Talbot said; "who wants the Johns' places?"

"Wal, I reckon that thar ain't any one of us can hold a 'full' hand in that line," Jake Shaw replied, after quite a long pause.

"Oh, I perceive, you intend, fellow-citizens, to turn out the heathen, but you don't want their places. That is, in reality, you in solemn caucus decide that Brown and myself shall in future cook our own victuals or go without," Talbot said, and just about that time, the long-headed ones of the crowd began to understand that the superintendent, so far, had the best of it.

"Wal, we hain't got anything to do with that," Jake replied, acting as spokesman for the rest. "We object to the Chinamen an' we want 'em cleaned out."

"That is, you mean that you intend to dictate to the Cinnabar Company how they shall carry on their business."

Jake looked puzzled for a moment but evaded the question by replying:

"We don't want to dictate to nobody or noffin', but we ain't a-goin' to work for this hyer mine if the Johns ain't made to quit!"

"That's so, that's so!" muttered three or four of the crowd.

Talbot saw that he was only wasting his breath in talking to the men, and so he cut the interview short.

"Men, you have a perfect right to decide whether you wish to work for this company or not; I don't dispute the justice of that, at all; but the Cinnabar Company also has the right to carry on their business in their own way, and it is not probable that they will yield any more than you will. To settle the matter here and now, I refuse to acknowledge your right to demand the discharge of any man in the employ of the Cinnabar Company, and I would see the mine sunk a hundred feet under ground before I would yield to any strike of this sort. I talked pretty plain to you the other day, and it is hardly necessary to repeat what I said then. I don't acknowledge the right of any one man, or twenty men,

to bully me in regard to how I shall run the machine in my charge. You men really have no more to do with those two Chinamen, than you have with the red-skins out in the woods. It looks to me as if there was something at the bottom of this, but, be that as it may, it don't make much difference; if you don't want to work, come up and say so; your money's ready for you, and you can get out."

"Look-a-here, you're talking pretty bold, Mister Talbot!" exclaimed Jake, sulkily; "we reckon that we've got some right in this hyer matter!"

Talbot took one step forward, while the strikers got a little closer to their leader. There was fight in the superintendent's manner.

With a powerful effort, though, Talbot restrained his angry passions.

A moment the two men looked at each other, Shaw's hand thrust behind him and grasping the revolver that he wore belted to his hip, while the superintendent's right hand was held in the pocket of the loose sack-coat that he wore.

If Shaw had made the slightest motion to draw the revolver, Dick's quick fingers would have put a bullet through him from the Derringer that ready-cocked was in his pocket, long before the leader of the strikers could have had time to raise the hammer of his weapon.

As we have said, just a moment the two looked upon each other, eye to eye, and then Shaw, perceiving that Talbot had got the "drop on him," to use the mining phrase, and that a single hostile motion on his part would be almost certain to send him to that long home where all men are equal, be they white or yellow, concluded that it was not any of his funeral just then.

Shaw removed his hand from his revolver, slowly.

"See hyar, pardner, I don't mean no offense, you know; I ain't a-goin' round jist now knockin' any chips offen no man's shoulder. I'm jist a-talkin' for my mates hyer."

"That's all well and good," Talbot said, quietly. "I seek no quarrel with any man, but if anybody wants to 'see' me, they won't have to hunt for me long."

"Wal, are you a-goin' to keep the Chinamen?" asked a voice from the throng.

"I reckon that's the hand I'll play, boys," Talbot replied.

"Thar's nary a white man in this hyer town will work for you then!" Shaw exclaimed, doggedly.

"We ain't the only gang that wants to clean out the heathen cusses. Mister Talbot, I warns you, as a friend, that you'll have trouble ef you let us go and keep the Johns!"

For the first time, Talbot began to have an idea of the extent of the conspiracy against the Cinnabar Company. The words of the striker implied that force would be used to keep men from working.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

COMING TO A FOCUS.

THE appearance of a new actor upon the scene gave a wondrous turn to the state of affairs.

The new-comer was the special agent of the Cinnabar Company, Hosa Congleton.

"Why, gentlemen, what is the matter?" he exclaimed, as he came to the scene of discussion.

"We folks have struck ag'in' the Chinamen," said Shaw.

"Why, why?" cried Congleton, apparently in great astonishment. "What is the matter?"

"We won't work with the Johns," said another one of the crowd.

Congleton, with a look of wonder upon his face, turned to Talbot as if to ask an explanation.

"These gentlemen have refused to work for the Cinnabar Company, unless I turn out the two Chinamen," Dick said.

"What answer have you made?" asked the special agent, caressing his bearded chin, apparently in deep reflection.

"Told them that I ran the machine just now, and while I do run it, it will be run my own way."

Congleton appeared for a few moments to be lost in thought; then, as if he had suddenly hit upon a plan to remove the difficulty, he addressed the strikers.

"Gentlemen, if you will retire for five minutes or so, I think I shall be able to arrange this matter satisfactorily, both to you and Mr. Talbot hyer."

"Now you're talkin'!" exclaimed Shaw, emphatically; "we'll git it!"

The procession fell back three or four hundred yards, and took up a position by the bank of the river.

Quite a little crowd had begun to assemble, attracted by the news that there was trouble at the Cinnabar works. In the smallest village there are always plenty of people to form an audience when a disturbance takes place.

Talbot could hardly restrain himself from expressing in his face the contempt he felt for the special agent, when the smiling Congleton approached him.

"Don't you think, Mr. Talbot, that it will be better for the affairs of the company if you yield to the demand of the men and discharge the Chinamen?"

"I'd see them in Tophet first!" replied Talbot.

"Of course that is very natural, taken individually," Congleton remarked; "but in this case the welfare of the company, whose salary you receive, requires that you should stifle all personal feeling and work things for the best for the company."

"You mean the salary that the company promised to pay me!" Talbot retorted, contemptuously. "But, in regard to your question, if we yield to this demand, what assurance have we that they will not attempt to regulate other matters? Say, perhaps, how many tons of ore we shall crush in a week."

"Oh, no! there's no danger of that!" Congleton exclaimed, confidently.

"Then, as special agent of the Cinnabar Company, you advise me to yield to this demand?" Talbot said, slowly.

"That is my advice," Congleton replied, with an assumption of great dignity.

Brown watched Talbot's face with visible anxiety; he expected an outburst of passion and feared the consequences. Like Dick, the foreman felt sure that the wily Frisco sharp was at the bottom of all the disturbance.

"Well, I will follow your advice, Mr. Congleton," Talbot said, and after quite a long pause; "the two

Chinamen shall leave; I accede to the demand of these men."

"That will settle the hull difficulty!" Congleton exclaimed, briskly, but even as he spoke, there was a peculiar smile lurking about the corners of his mouth, that Dick, shrewd observer as he was, saw augured no good to him.

Congleton walked off at a quick pace toward the men.

"Aha!" cried Brown, in glee, "you've got the better of that pole-cat this time. He would have bet his bottom dollar that you wouldn't give in to the men."

"Don't let us cry until we are out of the wood," Dick said, dryly. "There's trouble ahead, Bill; I can read it in that man's face!"

"Thunder!" cried Brown, in astonishment; "what do you suppose he'll be up to next?"

"We'll know that inside of thirty minutes or I'm no prophet!" Dick replied.

By this time Congleton had reached the strikers, and was busily engaged in conversation with them.

For five minutes at least the superintendent and the foreman watched the progress of the interview between the special agent and the men; it was evident from the manner of the parties concerned that the affair was not advancing toward a favorable conclusion. Then Shaw drew the revolver from his belt and flourished it in the air; four or five more of the men also drew weapons, and things looked decidedly hostile.

"Thunder! they ain't going for the Frisco chap, are they?" Brown exclaimed.

"Not a bit of it!" Talbot answered; "this little pantomime is intended for our benefit. Didn't I tell you that there was trouble ahead?"

Congleton left the men and returned to where Talbot and Brown were standing. The face of the special agent was very grave, and he looked as if he was troubled by some matter of deep moment.

"Mr. Talbot," Congleton said, as he came up to him, "I am very sorry to be obliged to state that the trouble is not settled yet."

"So I imagined," Dick replied, his cool tone and piercing look being decidedly uncomfortable to the gentleman from Frisco.

"The hands are not satisfied."

"I did not believe they would be," Talbot said, calmly. "What is it that the gentlemen want now? Do they desire that the fee-simple of the Cinnabar lode shall be vested in them?"

"Not so bad as that, exactly," Congleton replied, speaking very slowly.

"Well, spit it out; what do they want?"

"Mr. Talbot, I trust that you will consider my feelings in this matter," Congleton began; "what I have to say will probably be very unpleasant to you, and if I had imagined how this affair was going to turn, I should have tried to have kept out of it altogether."

"Oh, come to the point at once!" exclaimed Talbot, no longer able to conceal the feeling of contempt which was swelling in his bosom. "There is no love lost between us, Mr. Congleton. I'm no man's fool and I reckon I know who is at the bottom of all the trouble that has come to the Cinnabar mine since you've been in this city."

Congleton's coarse face flushed up; the truth was not pleasant, thus abruptly told.

"Mr. Talbot, you are laboring under some great mistake, sir!" he exclaimed, drawing himself up as he spoke, with an air of offended dignity.

"What do they want?" asked Talbot, entirely ignoring Congleton's words, and keeping straight to the business in hand.

"Well, sir, they declare that they find it impossible to work any longer under your superintendence, and request that you will resign the position."

"The old Injun with a new face!" Talbot exclaimed, contemptuously. "That's what they wanted when they struck for their back pay. These men appeared to have the idea that every ill the Cinnabar Company is heir to, can be ended by my getting out. Well, Mr. Congleton, in your capacity of special agent, I suppose you assured the men that I would yield as promptly to their second demand as I did to their first, and maybe you have appointed a new superintendent already."

"Oh, no," Congleton said, taking no notice of the sarcasm, although he had winced at the shot. "I merely told them that I thought you would be willing to resign rather than see the works stop; you and Mr. Brown both."

"They want him to 'dust' too?"

"Yes."

"The works stop, eh?" Talbot said, reflectively; "and who said that the works are going to stop?"

"Why, if the men refuse to work—"

"Are they the only men in Cinnabar City that can grip a pick or shovel?" cried Dick, fiercely; "and if they were, I reckon that there is a heap more men betwixt this town and Yreka."

"But they have resolved that they will not allow any men to take their places," Congleton urged.

"To resolve is one thing, to carry out the resolution is another!" Talbot exclaimed, grimly. "If they are better men than the men I put in their places, maybe they'll be able to shut up the Cinnabar mine, but I reckon there will be a few funerals round this town first, and not quite so many strikers!"

"But the property of the mine would be likely to be destroyed if there should be a row!" Congleton cried, affecting great concern.

"Not much danger of that," Talbot replied, dryly.

"But, really, I must protest against steps being taken to put the property of the mine in jeopardy!" Congleton persisted. "In my judgment I think that you should resign and I will see that the company makes it right with you."

"Resign!" cried Dick, in a rage, flaring up, "I'd see you, the Cinnabar Company, and these men yonder, your tools, in the hottest flames below first! I'll tell you what, Mr. Special Agent, it will take an earthquake to shake me out of the Cinnabar mine!"

"Well, sir, if you refuse to listen to reason, I shall be obliged to use the authority delegated to me by the President and Directors of the Cinnabar Company. I shall remove you from your office!" Congleton exclaimed, retreating.

"Remove your granny!" Talbot exclaimed, in contempt. "Go ahead with your dirty work! You haven't got the mine yet!"

And in five minutes more, Talbot and Brown, aided by the faithful O'Rourke, were inside the stockade of the mine, preparing to resist an attack.

CHAPTER XXXVII. O'ROURKE TO THE FORE.

CONGLETON had retreated to the strikers and reported to them the conversation that he had had with the superintendent.

"But, boys," he added, in conclusion, "I'm going to fix this matter up all right. I'm going to serve a notice on this bully of a superintendent, that his services are no longer required by the Cinnabar Company. He said right out just now that he didn't mean to let the heathen go; he was only a-playing with you, and that he intended to run the machine in his own way, or bust it!"

A growl of rage went up from the workmen as Congleton concluded his speech.

"I'll fix it in the shake of a lamb's tail, boys!" the special agent exclaimed; "I'll have him out of that mine before he's an hour older."

Then Congleton hurried off to write his notice, while the workmen remained by the bank of the river, discussing their grievances and casting threatening glances toward the stockade that hemmed in the Cinnabar mine.

The news of the difficulty had spread pretty rapidly around town, and quite a group of curious lookers-on had collected, all eager to see the fun.

Dame Rumor, too, with her hundred tongues—as potent in the mining camp of Cinnabar as in the great cities of civilization's heart—had wonderfully magnified the cause of the trouble.

It was commonly reported and readily believed, that the superintendent of the Cinnabar Company had announced his intention of discharging all the white men employed on the works, and filling their places with the yellow sons of heathen China.

As but natural, after such a report had been duly circulated and currently believed, the superintendent of the Cinnabar mine had few friends bold enough to attempt to stem the stream of popular opinion running so strongly against Dick Talbot.

As one of the strikers bluffedly declared:

"For two cents we'd just pull that old shanty down over his ears!" and the speaker shook his fist in menace toward the closed gate of the Cinnabar stockade.

Strange to relate, so strong had public opinion turned against Talbot, since it had been given out that he favored the cheap labor of the Chinese, that the summary course of action proposed by the indignant strikers met with the general approbation of the crowd, who had really no interest whatever in the affairs of the Cinnabar Company, and one generous individual in the throng in a burst of enthusiasm offered to advance the two cents necessary for a bringing on of the fun.

This public-spirited person, who was more conspicuous for his general seediness than for any thing else, was the irrepressible Joe Bowers.

But the more moderate workmen counseled that they should wait and see the result of Congleton's action before taking any step tending to violence.

To return to Talbot and Brown: after they had entered the stockade, they had shut the heavy gate and took measures to prepare for a siege.

The stockade was about six feet high and there were crevices between the logs that formed the fence, every foot or so, natural loop-holes for musketry.

The fence inclosed a space of about a hundred feet square, built in the form of a half-circle, each end resting upon the solid wall of rock that rose almost perpendicular from the earth to the heavens, and which formed the south-western side of the valley.

The canal which gave the power to run the machinery of the mine, entered under the stockade at the southern end and passed out at the north, flowing then straight back again to the parent stream, the swift gliding Shasta.

Within the inclosure was the mill where the stamps crushed the ore, the sluice-way for washing it, the shanty—Talbot and Brown's residence—and the little office which was store-house and office combined.

The stockade fence had been originally set up for warlike purposes, for at the time of the settlement of the valley, the fierce warriors of the red McCloud threatened perpetual enmity.

Talbot, biding Brown keep an eye upon the anticipated foe, had hurried into the shanty to procure arms and ammunition.

Dick stole quietly into his wife's room. She was sound asleep, and a gentle and peaceful smile illuminated her pale features. She looked better than she had for a long time and the heart of the stern, strong man experienced a great throb of joy as he noted the change. Then, withdrawing as quietly as he had entered, he went into Brown's apartment where the guns and ammunition were always kept.

A couple of six-shooting Colt's rifles stood in a corner, and near them, two revolvers hung on the wall. The cartridges were on a shelf handy.

Talbot stuffed his pocket full of the copper tubes, powder, ball, and cap combined, took the rifles and revolvers, then left the house and rejoined Brown, who, seated on a bowlder, was watching through a crevice in the fence the movements of the men gathered by the bank of the river.

Talbot gave the two revolvers to Brown, who, as a general rule, went unarmed, and leaning the rifles up against the fence, sat down on a bowlder a yard or so from the foreman.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Talbot, speaking as quietly as though he had questioned Brown as to the merits of a julep.

"Looks like a thunder-shower; may blow over though," Brown replied, reflectively.

"Brown, I've kinder got you into this," Talbot observed, slowly.

"Have you?" said the foreman, doubtfully. "Wal, now, I've been reckoning 'twas this pesky pole-cat of a special agent."

The careless expression fully revealed to Talbot that the barly foreman was with him to the death.

Silently, Dick leaned forward and extended his hand; Brown clasped it in his huge paw. The two men thoroughly understood each other; companions either for life or death.

"Dick, how about the Irishman?" asked Brown suddenly.

Talbot turned to look at O'Rourke; he was sitting with his back to him. The Irishman, rifle in hand, was looking through one of the crevices in the fence near the gate.

"It's none of his soup, you know," Brown added. "That's so," Talbot said, thoughtfully.

"Tain't exactly the cheese to mix up in our funeral."

"You're right, old man; I'll talk to him—explain matters; I rather think he don't exactly understand how things are." And then Talbot, raising his voice, called the Irishman.

"O'Rourke!"

"Yis, sur," replied the Irishman, and as he approached both Talbot and Brown noticed that he had the hammer of his rifle drawn back, and that he had belted two revolvers to his waist.

"Perhaps you're a little astonished at what has just taken place?" Talbot said, as the Irishman halted in front of him.

"Oh, no, sur," O'Rourke replied, quickly; "I've bin too long in 'Merica to be astonished at anything, sur."

"Well, we're going to have a fight!"

"More power to ye!" yelled the Irishman, evidently excited.

"But it's none of your funeral, you know—"

"Begorra! I hope it won't be!" O'Rourke interrupted.

"Yes, but you don't exactly understand," Talbot continued; "we're going to have a fight—"

"Shure and I understand that!" exclaimed O'Rourke. "Be the powers I'll break some of their heads, the dirty blaggards!"

"But it's no quarrel of yours—"

"Who the devil said it was?" demanded O'Rourke, evidently astonished.

"But there's no occasion for you to fight—"

"No occasion!" cried the Irishman, in a rage, "an' them blaggards shaking their dirty fists at us! Jist say the word, Misther Talbot, an' I'll go out an' murder the whole of them!"

Neither Brown nor Talbot could repress a smile at the eager earnestness of the warm-hearted son of the Green Isle.

"If you will only keep quiet a moment, O'Rourke," Talbot said, "I will explain just what the difficulty is."

"Oh, to the devil I'd pitch explanation!" cried O'Rourke, scornfully. "Let's fight furstan' explain afterward!"

"But it's none of your quarrel, and you need not fight at all," Dick explained. "You can walk out of the gate before the trouble begins. They have nothing against you."

"An' it is to get out I am, bekase the dirty blaggards didn't send me an invitation to fight wid 'em!" exclaimed O'Rourke, evidently in a state of high indignation. "Shure, Misther Talbot, it's a good man ye air; a dacent master a poor boy never had; but, by me soul! you insult the blood of the O'Rourke when you think that I'd walk out forinst that gate, an' leave you and Misther Brown for to fight them rapparees alone. No, sur! begorra! I'd die furstan' then I wouldn't!"

The two men were touched by the devotion of the Irishman. Talbot made one last effort to save him from the danger that he appeared to be so willing to encounter.

"See here, O'Rourke, if we do have a fight, which looks pretty probable just now, there may be some killing done; then if they get the best of us in the end, they may hang us."

"Misther Talbot, it's proud I'd be to be hanged by the side of you, sur," the Irishman replied, with a low bow.

There was no use arguing with such a man, and Talbot gave up the task.

"All right, old man; if you 'chip' in of your own free will, go it! I only wanted you to understand how matters stood."

"Oh, shure I know all about it, sur," O'Rourke replied, a cunning grin upon his face. "I heard two of them blaggards talkin' this morning, an' they were sayin' that it was time you wasn't here. But they haven't got you out yet, Misther Talbot. Be the powers! three of us wid these pop-guns could hould the place ag'in a hundred of them!"

"Hallo!" cried Brown, suddenly; "here's Congleton coming!"

Brown had been keeping watch through one of the crevices in the fence during the conversation between Talbot and the Irishman.

"He has a paper in his hand," observed Talbot, looking through one of the holes in the fence; "but I reckon it will take something more than that to get us out of this mine!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE LAST DEMAND.

CONGLETON advanced to within a hundred feet of the stockade and halted. As Talbot had noticed, the special agent had a folded paper in his hand.

"I should like to see Mr. Talbot," the special agent said.

"I'm here, sir; what do you want?"

"If you will have the kindness to step this way, I have a little document to deliver to you," Congleton said.

"The polecat don't dare to walk up like a man and spit out what he's got to say!" Brown exclaimed, in contempt.

Dick jumped down from the bowlder and proceeded to open the gate.

"I'll see what he wants," Talbot said, removing the heavy bar that held the gate closed. "We'll use no violence except in self-defense."

"Mebbe they're up to some gum-game," Brown suggested, suspiciously.

"Cover Congleton with your rifle; if they make a sign of advancing upon me, drive a ball through him!" Talbot said, tersely.

"You bet!"

The two little words and Brown's emphatic manner of delivery spoke volumes.

Talbot threw open the gate and walked forth toward the speculator. Before he had got half-way to him, though, a visible change appeared in Congleton's manner. His face grew a trifle white and his eyes moved nervously in their sockets. Talbot guessed the reason. The speculator had discovered Brown and the shining tube of the Colt rifle.

"See hyer, I don't understand this sort of thing!"

the lawyer exclaimed, in expostulation, as Talbot approached.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, Mr. Brown with that gun!" Congleton replied.

"I reckon he won't trouble you if your folks over there keep quiet," Talbot observed, coolly. "Now, then, sir, I'm here; what do you want with me?"

"Mr. Talbot, a very unpleasant duty has devolved upon me," the speculator said, striving to appear composed and dignified, a rather difficult task for even a braver man than the special agent, considering that Brown, with an ugly look upon his face, was leaning over the top of the stockade, his fingers playing carelessly with the lock of the rifle that he held in his hands. "I repeat, sir, a very disagreeable duty. You must be aware that, after what has happened, it will be impossible for you to hold the position you now occupy. As the representative of the Cinnabar Company, I hereby give you a chance to personally tender me your resignation."

"And if I don't see fit to do that?" Talbot asked, quietly.

"Then, sir, I shall be obliged to deliver to you this letter, which contains an official notification that the services of yourself and Mr. Brown are no longer required by the Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company."

"I guess you'd better give me the official notification," Talbot observed, in his quiet way.

"There it is, sir; that is your notification, sir, and if you will have the kindness to show it to Mr. Brown, I shall be much obliged, sir."

Congleton handed the paper which he held in his hand to the superintendent.

Talbot opened the letter and read it through carefully. It was merely a notice couched in exceedingly brief terms that the services of himself and Mr. Brown were no longer required by the Cinnabar Company.

"No reason assigned here for this action, I see," Talbot remarked, reflectively.

"Really, I was not aware that any reason was required," Congleton replied; "but if you carry this matter into a law-court, probably the Cinnabar Company will be able to give good and sufficient reasons for their action, or stand the hazard of failing to do so."

"Oh, you expect this affair to get into a law-court, eh?"

"The company stands ready, sir, to meet you there, if you think you are wronged by our action."

"You are posted in the law, I suppose," Talbot said, in a thoughtful sort of way.

"In regard to this case, I reckon I am posted," Congleton affirmed, in a tone of easy condescension.

"Did you ever hear the saying that possession was nine points of the law?"

"Well, yes, I think I have."

"Notice to quit, and signed by Hosa Congleton, special agent Cinnabar Quartz Mining Company," murmured Talbot, thoughtfully, gazing at the paper which he held open in his hand.

Then, in the coolest and quietest manner possible, he tore the letter into little bits, put them all on the palm of his hand, and with a gentle puff of his breath blew them into the face of the astonished Frisco sharp.

"That's my answer to you, sir," Talbot said; "now git! and just bear in mind that I hold the Cinnabar works, and will hold 'em against Satan himself!"

Talbot turned upon his heel and strode back toward the mine, leaving the special agent almost speechless with rage. He did not dare to show his passion, though, nor make any attack upon the man who had so carelessly walked away from him, for he knew that Brown, from the top of the stockade, kept a wary eye upon him.

Chafing with rage, and yet well pleased that the superintendent had so boldly challenged his power, Congleton hurried back to where the strikers were gathered by the bank of the river.

Quite a crowd of loungers had assembled, eager to see the fun, and as Congleton came up to the crowd, Hughes, the Mayor, arrived upon the scene.

To the Mayor Congleton briefly explained all that had occurred.

Hughes, of course, instantly sided with the special agent, but suggested it was probable there would be considerable trouble in getting possession of the mine.

"Not at all!" Congleton rejoined, briskly; "there's twenty of the boys hyer, at least, that will take a hand in the fun. They'll knuckle fast enough when they see that we're in dead earnest, this hyer durned superintendent and foreman."

"Well, go it; I'll get out of the way, so that they can't call upon me to interfere," and the Mayor departed.

Kentuck arrived just at this moment and volunteered too, urging them to go in and "wipe out" the superintendent.

Since Talbot had interfered in behalf of the two Chinamen he had fallen into very bad repute with the miners generally. It had been asserted around town, too, that the superintendent of the Cinnabar works had openly said that in a month he wouldn't have a white man on the place.

And with this sort of feeling existing in the breasts of the brawny miners, it did not require much urging on the part of Congleton and his captains, Kentuck, Yankee Jim and Jake Shaw, to work the passions of the miners up to fever heat against Talbot.

"Gents!" cried Congleton, as a "wind-up," "I'll give a thousand dollars to be put in possession of the Cinnabar mine! You kin share it among you jess as you like—say share and share alike for all that takes part in the fuss!"

"Let's go fur 'em!" cried Shaw, drawing a revolver from his belt and flourishing it in the air.

"Hold on! Let's give 'em fair warning; mebbe they'll quit without any fight when they see that we mean biz," suggested another one of the crowd.

This idea was received with general favor, and so it was resolved to send a white flag in charge of Shaw, to negotiate with Talbot and Brown in regard to a surrender.

Before the flag of truce was dispatched, the attacking force was divided into three squads, commanded by Jake Shaw, Yankee Jim, and the gambler, Kentuck.

The first squad was designed to operate against the stockade from the north, the second from the

south, and the third was to force the gate of the stockade.

Cautiously, taking advantage of the shanties that were convenient for cover, the three detachments got into position.

A hundred yards of open ground surrounded the Cinnabar works on three sides; on the fourth, the wall of rock, in which was the tunnel of the company, rose straight upward for three hundred feet at least.

With the white flag, a dirty-brown towel tied on a stick, Jack Shaw stepped boldly forward and walked up to the gate of the stockade.

When he got within a dozen feet of the fence, Talbot's head rose above the stockade.

"Well, Mr. Shaw, what can I do for you?" the superintendent demanded.

"We're goin' to take this hyer shebang, an' we want to know if you're willin' to quit peaceably," Mr. Shaw said, boldly.

"Nary quit," replied the superintendent, laconically.

"See hyer, we mean business!" Jake observed.

"So do I!"

"You won't quit?"

"See you in blazes first!"

"Somebody'll get hurt!"

"I reckon that's so; picked out your tombstone yet?"

"You won't quit?" No notice taken of Talbot's facetious question.

"Nary time!"

"Thar'll be trouble!" And with this remark, Mr. Shaw retreated.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE ATTACK.

THE three within the beleaguered stockade prepared for the apparently inevitable encounter.

Talbot had noticed the three detachments approaching the mine in different directions, and understood at once that it was the intention of the assailing party to attack at three separate points at the same moment so as to divide the fire of the defense.

"Brown, you take the north fence, I'll take the south, and, O'Rourke, you take the gate," Talbot said. "Pick your men, and drop them as they come in. Don't fire in a hurry. Aim first at the leader of the party. If we can lay out two or three of the foremost men, the rest won't have much stomach to climb over the fence and we popping at 'em with our revolvers. Take 'em quietly, and plug the leaders first."

O'Rourke, whose Celtic blood was in a flame at the prospect of a ruction, could not restrain the delight he felt at exchanging shots with the "blaggards."

"How about the wife?" Brown questioned, in an undertone, as he passed by Talbot to take his position on the north.

"She will hardly suspect the truth," Talbot replied; "it cannot be helped; it is Heaven's will. Blood must be shed. We are in the right and must conquer."

"I hope that the special agent will take a hand in the fun," Brown said, grimly. "Let me get a single crack at him and I reckon that thar will be one polecat less in this world."

Silently, Talbot wrung Brown's outstretched hand. Then a cry from O'Rourke alarmed them.

"Oh, holy smoke! they're comin', the blaggards!"

With nimble feet, both Talbot and Brown hurried to their posts, cocking their rifles as they ran.

As the Irishman had said, the three detachments were dashing at the fort at the top of their speed, encouraging each other as they ran, with loud and savage yells.

The attacking force got within two hundred feet of the fence before there was a single manifestation of hostilities upon the part of the besieged.

Then Talbot deliberately took aim at Yankee Jim, who led the attacking force designed to operate against the southern side of the stockade, and the ruffian went down with a yell, a ball through the fleshy part of his leg.

The sound of Brown's rifle re-echoed that of Talbot, and Jake Shaw, with a bullet through his shoulder, fell, cursing and groaning, to the ground. Then followed a regular volley of shots as O'Rourke fired the whole six barrels of his piece at the attacking force as fast as he possibly could, and then, in a frantic sort of way, grabbed his revolvers and blazed away with them.

O'Rourke's first shot had grazed Kentuck's cheek and drawn the blood; the Irishman had fired to kill, unlike Talbot and Brown, who merely tried to disable their men, and O'Rourke, therefore, had aimed at the head.

Kentuck had halted and clapped his hand to his cheek, under the impression that he was badly hurt; the rest had halted also, following their leader's example, and then had come the wild discharge of O'Rourke's fire pattering harmlessly about their heads, but it produced a panic, and fancying that they were exposed to the whole fire of the "garrison," the whole party had retreated in hot haste.

The example of the middle detachment was not lost upon the other two, and as they had halted upon the fall of their respective leaders, they improved the chance to turn the halt into a full retreat, carrying the wounded men with them.

Then O'Rourke's head appeared above the stockade.

Wild and exulting shouts came from the battle-crazed Irishman. Defiantly he called upon the retreating foe to come back and be "kilt" like "gentlemen," and upbraided them for showing the "full front" of their backs at the first fire.

But the discomfited foe were quite satisfied with the trial they had had, and were not to be taunted into a second attack at present. And, as is quite usual in such cases, each detachment blamed the other for being the first to show the white feather.

Then, too, when they had examined the wounds of the men who had been hurt, and discovered that they were far from being dangerous, their rage knew no bounds.

Kentuck felt disgusted with himself that he had allowed his panic-stricken followers to carry him away with their rush.

"We're a set of infernal fools!" he exclaimed, savagely. "Why, we had the game right in our own hands when we got skinned an' run like a pack of darned frightened rabbits!"

Then came a lot of blustering talk. Each individual man asserting that he hadn't run until he'd seen somebody else run, and the entire force, although they had not been very eager to fight Talbot and his friends when the time for action came, now arrived within an ace of getting into a most tremendous fight among themselves as to who had run first.

With considerable difficulty, Kentuck managed to quell the troubled waters of dispute, and then arranged the plan for a second attack upon the stockade.

"There's only three men inside the fence," he exclaimed. "They can't fire more than six shots apiece with their rifles, and then they'll have to fall back on their revolvers, and revolvers are mighty onsartin. Now, we don't want to attack in regular bodies at all; we want to jest spread out like a fan, each man on his own hook, and skirmish up. Jest as soon as their six shots apiece are fired, they're done for."

"But how will we git over that blamed fence?" asked a stalwart miner, who evidently meant business.

"Cut the canal that flows under the fence and let the water back ag'in into the river," suggested Kentuck, eager to damage the property of the mine all he could. "Then we can get under the fence where the water goes now."

The gambler unconsciously was but repeating the old expedient that gave the foreign foe entrance to hundred-gated Babylon, the jewel of the East.

Eagerly the miners ran off to fulfill the injunction of their leader, and in fifteen minutes more the waters of the canal were turned back again into the parent river, and the stream that was wont to give power to the Cinnabar mill grew less and less as the water flowed off, and no fresh water came to replace it.

Within the stockade O'Rourke was the first one who happened to notice the decrease of the water.

"Oh, Mother of Moses! will ye look at that?" he cried, in horror, running up to Talbot and pointing to the canal. "Shure! the water's dryin' up, be gobl!"

Talbot and Brown instantly looked in the direction indicated by the Irishman. They understood what had happened.

"They've cut the canal," Brown said, tersely, and he helped himself to a chew of tobacco.

"They are determined to ruin the works!" Talbot exclaimed, bitterly.

"It looks like it, pard," Brown responded. "I tell you what it is, old man, we've struck the bed-rock in this hyer concern. I reckon we won't make a million outen this and go East to enjoy it!"

"Will anybody else make any thing out of it?" Talbot asked, a gleam of fire in his dark eyes.

"I reckon not much!" Brown exclaimed, fingering the lock of his rifle in an extremely significant manner.

"Brown, did you try to kill the man you aimed at just now?"

"No."

"Neither did I, although I might have killed him as easy as to have put a ball through his leg, as I did."

"Dick, old fellow, I'm goin' to shoot to kill this time!" Brown exclaimed, abruptly. "I begin to see now that this is real business. These asses would kill us as quick as a wink, if they could."

"Perhaps they intend to use the canal so as to get under the stockade."

Then a yell from O'Rourke interrupted them, just as it had done on the occasion of the previous attack!

"They're comin' ag'in, the dhirty blaggards, bad 'cess to 'em!" cried O'Rourke.

As the attacking force had decided, they came up in skirmishing-line fashion, each man for himself, and taking advantage of the cover afforded by the neighboring shanties.

Four or five of the attacking party were armed with rifles, and the bullets began to sing in the air as they whistled over the stockade, or with a dull thud buried themselves in the wood of the logs.

"This r'ally looks like work," observed Brown, coolly, as he poked the muzzle of his rifle out through one of the holes in the stockade, and took deliberate aim at a marksman whose head appeared from behind a huge bowler. "I think I can plug that red-headed galoot!" he remarked, abstractedly, as he peered through the sights of the rifle.

And just as the sound of the report rung out on the air, came the shrill cry of a woman.

"That's my wife!" cried Dick, in anguished tones.

CHAPTER XL.

A BLOODY DEFEAT.

EVEN bluff and burly Brown shivered when the piercing scream of the woman rung in his ears. As for O'Rourke, he was too eagerly watching for a shot at the assailants—his brain too full of the hot Celtic war-blood to hear anything except the sounds of strife.

Brown, with a white and scared face, looked at Talbot.

Injun Dick—man of ice and heart of iron—only betrayed, by the increased pallor of his face, the dire apprehension that filled his heart.

"What—what was that?" Brown said, slowly.

"Heaven only knows!" replied Talbot, his face deeply lined, and his brows contracted. "I fear the worst."

"Hain't you better go and see!" suggested Brown.

"And let these villains take the stockade and murder you in cold blood?" cried Talbot, his veins swelling with angry passion. "No, first we'll beat these hounds back, and then—"

A fresh discharge of shots and a yell from the hoarse throats of the besieging force interrupted Talbot's speech.

Both of the men, without further words, hurried to their respective posts.

Hardly had they reached the stockade when the attacking party, at a signal from Kentuck, quitted their shelter, and dashed forward at the top of their speed toward the fence.

There were some twenty-eight or thirty men in the attacking force, and they had entirely surrounded the stockade, their line stretching from the wall of rock on the north to the same wall of rock on the south.

The men of the attacking line were irregularly distributed at distances ranging from twenty-five to seventy feet from each other.

It was the principle of the skirmish line of the regular battle tactics over again. But as the line closed in to the mine, naturally the attack became directed to three distinct points: the gate of the stockade in the center, the dry bed of the canal, entering under the fence at the south, and the similar dry bed passing out under the fence at the north.

The attack on the gate at the center was directed by Kentuck, but at the canal entrances each man fought on his own hook.

The moment the foe appeared in sight, O'Rourke, notwithstanding that he had been cautioned in regard to rapid firing, at once opened the ball, and poured the entire contents of his rifle, six shots, at the men of the skirmish line, without taking much care as to his aim.

The result was that as the men of the attacking force were not huddled together, as had been the case at the first attack, O'Rourke's wild discharge did not damage them in the least.

Obedient to Kentuck's orders, they had thrown themselves flat upon the ground, and the balls had whistled harmlessly over their heads.

After he had fired, O'Rourke discovering, for the first time, that the entire attacking line in his front was prostrate upon the ground, jumped to the conclusion that he had succeeded in killing the whole party, and as a natural consequence he celebrated his victory by a series of terrific yells.

"We've bate thim!" he shouted. "Oh, Mother of Moses! I've kilt ivery blaggard of thim! whoop!"

Conceive the astonishment and disgust of the triumphant son of the Emerald Isle when the supposed dead men jumped up and poured a volley at him as he incautiously exposed one half of his body above the stockade, in his eagerness to note the results of his supposed deadly fire.

Just a single exclamation of astonishment came from O'Rourke's lips at the miracle of the dead men coming to life so suddenly, and the bullets whistled by his ears, and one, better directed than the rest, struck him in the left shoulder, and hurled him to the ground, where he lay half stunned by the shock, and pretty effectually disabled from taking much further interest in the struggle.

Kentuck and the men under his command set up a loud shout when they saw the luckless Irishman tumble headlong from his perch behind the wall, and with renewed hopes from this partial triumph they rushed onward.

Brown, when attracted by the sounds that denoted an immediate attack had hurried to his post by the bank of the canal, cocking his rifle as he ran.

Thrusting the barrel through one of the loopholes in the fence, he had taken deliberate aim at the man nearest to him, and with the same coolness, as if it was but a senseless mark of painted wood, instead of a living, breathing human, had pulled the trigger, and the faithful weapon sped the leaden ball straight to the heart of the assailant.

With scarcely a groan—merely a throwing up of the hands and a convulsive clutch at the air, the stricken man fell upon his face, dead.

A second more, and in that second, the firm finger of the Cinnabar foreman had recoiled the rifle, taken a deadly aim at another yelling assailant, and had stretched him writhing upon the earth with a ball through his lungs.

The fall of the second man checked the hostile advance, the line came to an abrupt halt; each man asked himself if it would not be his turn next, and each one did not care to have the question answered.

A scattering volley of shots the hesitating assailants directed at the stockade which concealed their unknown foe.

One of the random bullets cut through the flannel shirt of the burly foreman and grazed the skin beneath.

Smarting with pain and believing the wound to be much more serious than it really was, again Brown glared along the hollow tube, again the finger sped the missile, and again there was a hollow groan and a man was cut down by the unerring ball.

Just a single cry, "I'm played, boys!" and a young miner, who had no possible concern in the quarrel in which he had freely entered, "jes' for fun," was sent, all his sins upon his head, to his final reckoning.

Three men killed and not fifty foot of ground gained, was it a wonder that the panic-stricken skirmish line broke in sad disorder and fell back to their former shelter, each man running for his life and expecting every moment to hear the crack of the death-dealing rifle, and perhaps to feel the metal messenger of fate tearing its way amid his flesh?

But the keen-eyed, cool-nerved marksman fired not at the beaten and flying foe; it was strictly in self-defense he fought, but he had made up his mind that the mad assailants, one-half of whom had espoused a quarrel not their own, should distinctly understand that this was war and not jesting.

"Evil to him from whom evil cometh."

And on his side, Talbot had routed the attacking force more quietly even than had Brown, and with far more direful results.

Talbot's blood was in a flame. He feared the worst for his wife. The terrible scream that had come from her lips was still ringing in his ears. A man of an ordinary nature, an event of this fearful kind would have totally unfitted for cool calculation and the nice discrimination necessary to the marksman's art.

Not so with Talbot. The blood was boiling in every vein; not a pulse in his body but swelled to its utmost with excitement; for the time he became blood-thirsty; as the parched traveler in the desert waste craves for the sparkling water that should satisfy tyrant nature, so Injun Dick craved for the lives of the men that menaced him—craved for their blood to satisfy the thirst for vengeance that now raged within his heart.

As he dropped upon his knee, brought his rifle to his shoulder, and glared through the loop-hole in the stockade, calm as a smiling gallant treading with his love the mazes of the dance was the white-faced man, whose eyes shot lurid fires and whose firm-pressed lips seemed chiseled out of marble.

Nine brawny, bearded men, arms in their hands, oaths upon their lips, and the wild dancer of the

ment tugging at their heart-strings, were bounding over the earth, determined to take the fortress at a single dash.

Only a hundred and fifty feet and then the bed of the canal, now only a muddy pathway, would afford them easy access under the stockade.

One minute the onward rush of the armed line, all converging toward the canal bed, their defiant yells filling the air; the next a field of slaughter and the panic-stricken fugitives flying for their lives.

Within a single minute the rifle of Talbot sounded on the air six times, and each ball sped by the potent powder found its billet in a human form.

Four men on the field killed outright—the crack of rifle answered by the hollow groans that announced the coming of the grim king of terrors—two men severely wounded and incapable of moving.

And then, hastily reloading the cylinder of the rifle, the blood-crazed marksman glared through the stockade intent upon more prey.

And at that moment, just as the attacking forces upon the north and south were flying in sad disorder, there came a triumphant yell from the direction of the center gate.

Both Talbot and Brown turned quickly toward the spot. They saw O'Rourke upon the ground, one of the assailants half-over the wall, and the heads of two others visible above it.

But before the two could move finger, O'Rourke, disabled as he was, with a mighty effort raised his hand which still grasped a revolver, and shot the man on the wall straight through the temple. With a shriek of pain the assailant loosed his gripe, and falling backward, dislodged the other two.

CHAPTER XLI.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

THE bravest of men when collected in a body are almost as liable to be stricken by a sudden panic as a crowd of cowards. And so it happened to the attacking party at the center of the gate, headed by Kentuck.

They had witnessed the flight of their comrades on the north and south, but it had only inspired them with renewed desire to capture the stockade, and avenge the bloody reception that their fellow-soldiers had met.

But when Phil Mulligan, the noted desperado, came tumbling down in their midst, the death-yell breaking from his lips, and his bronzed forehead stained with his blood, they hesitated; a sudden fear had seized upon them.

Kentuck alone of all the party still retained his courage.

In the faces of his companions he saw the impression produced by the death of Mulligan, and understood at once that they were about to seek safety in flight.

This, to his mind, was madness, for he felt sure that a determined attack now would win the stockade. He saw that no time was to be lost.

"At it again, boys!" he cried; "one try more and we've got 'em!"

But even as the vaunt came from his lips, Talbot and Brown, who had hastened to the spot, poked the muzzles of their rifles through the loopholes in the stockade, and opened fire upon the attacking force.

So near were they to the assailants, that the powder-flame that came from the muzzles of the rifles singed the clothes of the miners. But as the defenders of the stockade had merely blazed away without taking any particular aim, the assailants escaped any serious harm from the two shots.

The sudden fire was quite enough to counterbalance Kentuck's words. The miners fled in wild disorder, scattering to the north and south, so as to get out of the direct range of the loopholes. So thoroughly demoralized were the fugitives that half of them at least threw away their weapons that they might run the faster.

So thirsty for blood was Talbot that he leaped upon the bowlder from which O'Rourke had fallen, and drew a deliberate "bead" upon one of the flying fugitives, and fired.

Brown, perceiving the action, cried aloud in alarm, and grasped Talbot by the leg.

The foreman's movement probably saved the life of Kentuck, for it was the leader of the assailants that Talbot had singled out for a victim.

The ball whistled through the air, not more than six inches above the head of the gambler.

"Hold on, Dick; don't fire 'cept in self-defense!" the foreman cried.

The words recalled Talbot to his senses.

"You are right," he cried, dropping the butt of his rifle from his shoulder. "I am sorry you spoke, though, for if you had kept quiet, I would have put a ball through that Kentuck, as sure as there is a sky above us."

"Wal, I'm sorry I did speak," Brown said, reflectively, "if it saved that 'tarnal pole-cat; but how in thunder could I tell who you were aiming at? You see, Dick, this has been an awful bloody business, anyway!"

"Is it not right that a man should protect his own?" Talbot said, as he descended from the bowlder.

"Sart'in; but it's awful the way these poor fellows rushed to death. 'Tain't our fault, though. Are they clean gone?"

"There is not one within range, now. They will not be apt to renew the attack in some time, if they do at all. They have suffered severely in this last affair."

Then Talbot cast a look at O'Rourke, who was lying quite still upon the ground, with his eyes closed.

"Brown, you look after him," and Dick pointed to the Irishman. "I'm afraid that he is done for. I'll be back soon. If you see any movement on the part of the enemy, call me!"

Talbot cast his rifle into the hollow of his arm, and, with a wild expression upon his pale face, took his way to the shanty. As he walked over the ground, with his long, nervous stride, his head slightly bent forward, he seemed to Brown's anxious eyes more like a metal image of a man, strangely endowed with life, than like a human being.

A long-drawn sigh came from Brown's lips as he watched Talbot enter the door of the shanty. The imagination of the stalwart miner pictured the scene of horror which he felt sure would meet the eyes of the anxious husband. Since the time when

that one wild scream had rung upon the air, not a sound denoting human life had come from the house. The silence of the tomb had reigned there, and that silence predicted terrible things.

"I reckon he's prepared for the worst, though," Brown said, in a low undertone, communing with himself. And then, after this comforting observation, he turned his attention to O'Rourke.

The wounded Irishman was lying all curled up in a heap; the pistol-shot had cost him a terrible effort, and after the exertion he had fainted.

Brown knelt down by his side and examined the wound. The red shirt which covered the Irishman's breast was stained a darker scarlet by the blood that had flown from the hurt.

The foreman, during his life of adventure, had picked up quite a deal of knowledge concerning gunpowder wounds, and as he examined O'Rourke's chest, pushing back the shirt for that purpose, he shook his head dubiously.

"By king! they've plugged him pretty bad!" Brown exclaimed. "I'm afeared he's a goner."

Taking out his handkerchief, the foreman, softly and delicately, proceeded to wipe away the blood, half congealed on the Irishman's brawny breast.

The touch, slight as it was, seemed to rouse O'Rourke from his stupor.

"The saints be good to us!" he murmured, faintly, as he opened his eyes, evidently bewildered. Then he caught sight of Brown's bearded face, as the foreman bent over him; back to the memory of the wounded man came the recollections of the fight in which he had received his hurt.

"Have we bate him?" he asked, eagerly, attempting to rise as he spoke, but his strength was not equal to the effort.

"Yes; don't try to get up!" Brown said, noticing that the effort had caused the blood to flow faster from the wound.

"Shure, it's purty bad I'm hurted," murmured the Irishman; "but we bate him, though, bad 'cess to the dirty blaggards. I thought I'd kilt the hull of them. I must have bin blind, for I saw him all on the ground, an' thin they all kim to life an' blazed away at me."

"Does the wound pain you much?" asked Brown, again attempting to wipe away the blood.

"Would it be plasing to yees fur to have a red-hot poker stick in atune yer ribs, Msther Brown?" O'Rourke said, pathetically.

"And is that the way it feels?"

"Bedad it is."

Hardly had the words left the lips of the wounded man when Brown noticed a decided change come over his face, his breathing became more labored, and it was evident that every inspiration caused a pang of pain.

"How long is it since we bate him?" O'Rourke muttered, quite feebly.

"Only a few minutes," Brown replied, wondering at the question.

"The darkness is comin' on early to-night," and the Irishman half-closed his eyes as he spoke.

Brown at once came to the conclusion that O'Rourke's mind was wandering.

"Oh, no; the darkness won't come for two hours yet," the foreman returned, hardly knowing what to say and fearing the worst.

"Maybe it's light to you," O'Rourke murmured, slowly, "but it's mighty dark to me. We bate him, though."

Just a single flash of triumph came from the eyes of the wounded man, and then, with a single groan from the lips, the soul of the stricken one fled from its earthly tenement and sought that haven of peace where strife is not and light is universal.

Brown shook his head mournfully.

"A better-hearted boy never drew the breath of life," he said, slowly. "I hope when my time comes that I'll pass in my checks as easy."

The foreman rose to his feet, and with a very grave expression upon his face walked to the stockade and took a look at the foe.

No hostile menace could he discover. For the present there was very little danger of an attack. It would take time to reanimate the courage of Kentuck's followers.

Brown sat down upon a stone and waited for events to develop themselves.

Ten, twenty, thirty minutes he waited. All was quiet without the stockade. The crowd by the bank of the river kept constantly increasing, but did not seem inclined to take hostile action against the fortress which had been defended so bravely.

Talbot had not come from the shanty, and Brown argued the worst from his delay, but he felt a natural delicacy about proceeding to learn the cause of it.

After some thirty minutes or so from the time that he had taken up his position upon the bowlder, Brown noticed a decided movement in the crowd congregated by the river.

A man advanced toward the stockade, a white flag in his hand.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

BROWN recognized the man advancing with the white flag at once. It was Jimmy Hughes, Mayor of the city.

When Hughes got within a short distance of the stockade, Brown brought his rifle to his shoulder and took deliberate aim at Hughes, much to that gentleman's annoyance.

"Hello! what are you 'bout?" Hughes exclaimed, coming to a halt and looking nervously around him as if in search of shelter. "You wouldn't fire onto a flag of truce, would you?"

"That depends upon circumstances," Brown replied. "What mought you want, Mister Flag-of-truce?"

"I want to have a talk with you folks 'bout this hyer business," Hughes answered, still nervously looking at the threatening rifle, which Brown kept at his shoulder.

"Spit out what you've got to say," was Brown's peremptory retort.

"Is Talbot thar?"

"He ain't fur off."

"You'd better call him an' see if we can fix up this fuss. Thar's been a heap of blood spilt 'ready, an' I reckon thar'll be more if things ain't fixed."

Brown's first thought was that the flag of truce

was merely a device to throw the defenders of the stockade off their guard, and then take advantage of the *ruse* to spring a sudden attack upon them. But, after glancing at the enemy, gathered by the river, it was plainly evident that they had no idea of advancing against the well defended fortification for the present.

"All right; I'll tell the superintendent," Brown said; then he dismounted from the bowlder, disappearing from the sight of Hughes behind the fence. But, as the feet of the foreman touched the ground, it occurred to him that it would be as well to deceive Hughes into the belief that he was still in personal danger. So he exclaimed, just loud enough for Hughes to hear:

"O'Rourke, draw a bead on Mister Hughes, and if you see any signs of a gum-game, plug him!"

And then he picked up the gun of the dead Irishman and thrust the muzzle through one of the holes in the fence, supporting the butt upon a convenient bowlder.

Hughes was now doubly alarmed. He could see the barrel of the rifle sticking through the fence, and he nothing doubted that the Irishman was at the other end of it.

"It's all square, Mr. Brown!" he exclaimed. "I pledge you my word that every thing is all right. We want to settle the matter up without further bloodshed."

"No danger to you, Mr. Hughes, if the folks yonder don't try to flank us," Brown replied, from behind the stockade. And then he pretended to give further orders to O'Rourke.

"Don't fire on the flag unless you see signs of treachery."

"Yes, Mr. O'Rourke, be careful," exclaimed the Mayor, who began to feel that he was in a very awkward position; "for heaven's sake be careful how you fool with the trigger of that cursed rifle. You might set the thing off without intending to do so."

Brown, chuckling inwardly at the success of his clever *ruse*, walked toward Dick's shanty.

Not a sound came from the house. Brown hesitated as he stood upon the threshold, his hand upon the latch. It seemed to him like entering a tomb.

"Thar's death inside, I reckon," the foreman muttered, to himself, as he lifted the latch and entered.

The lower floor of the shanty consisted of one large room, from which a rude stairway led to the second story, which was divided into two small apartments.

Talbot was not in the lower room.

"I reckon he's up-stairs with his wife," Brown murmured, as he ascended the frail stairway, which creaked and groaned under his weight.

At the head of the staircase was a little entry running across the house. In it were two doors leading to the apartments into which the upper story had been divided. The rear room, which faced the wall of rock, was occupied by Brown, the front one, the window of which looked out upon the town, had been assigned to Talbot. The door of the room was open, but not a sound came from within. Brown half hesitated as he advanced to the open door. He feared to see what he should see.

And, standing in the doorway, a fearful sight met his eyes—a scene of horror which made even his firm nerves tremble, and congealed the blood within his veins.

Upon the little bed lay Talbot's wife, stone dead, the blood oozing from a fearful wound in her breast, and her white night-dress all stained with the clotted gore.

The sight made Brown sick at heart; his head reeled, and but that he had rested his hand against the side of the door, he would have staggered back.

Kneeling by the bedside, his face buried in his hands, was Talbot; still as a statue carved in marble, he seemed not to heed the presence of the foreman.

After a moment Brown recovered from the feeling of horror that had taken complete possession of him when first he had looked upon the fearful scene.

Death, seizing upon the person of the young and lovely woman within the silent chamber, seemed infinitely more terrible than when his iron talons had clutched strong men upon the field of battle, with weapons in their hands and oaths upon their lips.

Gladly would the burly foreman have noiselessly withdrawn from this chamber of horrors, without disturbing the silent man, who was evidently in such deep affliction, had not circumstances compelled him to interrupt the mourner.

"Talbot!" Brown said, at length, feeling that he must speak.

Silently and slowly Dick raised his head, and to Brown's horror, he saw that the pale face of Talbot was streaked here and there with the blood of his murdered wife.

"They've sent a flag of truce."

Talbot gazed at Brown like a man who did not understand the meaning of the words. It was as if the dreadful calamity that had befallen him had deprived him of reason.

Brown was staggered for a moment as he looked upon the stolid face—so utterly devoid of all expression.

"Don't you understand, Dick?" he questioned, anxiously. "They've sent a flag of truce—you know—the fellows we've been fighting with."

"Yes, the murdering hounds of Satan whose bloody work is here," Talbot said, slowly, and in a voice as cold and low as the echo from a church-yard vault.

"It's Hughes—Jimmy Hughes, you know, the Mayor."

"What does he want?"

"To see you."

"I'll see him," Talbot replied; for the first time seeming to wake from the trance-like state into which he had fallen. There was a fearful meaning, too, in the manner in which he spoke the simple sentence.

Talbot stooped and picked his rifle up from the floor where it was lying.

Brown ventured a question.

"Was she dead, Dick, when you came?"

"Yes," Talbot answered, in the low and measured tone in which he had first spoken; a voice more fit-

ting a cunning machine framed in imitation of a man, than a man himself.

"I suppose she was hit jest afore we heard that scream."

"Yes, the ball entered through the window," Talbot pointed to the shattered glass.

"Poor thing! it was rough," Brown observed, feelingly.

"Yes, she was the only tie that bound me to the world. I seem to be fated to bring death to all that love me!" Talbot said, slowly. "Go ahead; I'll follow you in a moment."

Brown withdrew at once; he understood that Talbot desired to be for a moment alone with his murdered wife.

A single instant, with firm-pressed lips and staring eyes, Talbot looked upon the features, now cold in death, of the woman he had once loved so well. Then, kneeling again by her side, he dipped the fingers of his right hand in the clotted gore that had come from the terrible wound through which the light had fled, and then, carrying the blood-stained hand to his lips, he kissed it solemnly.

"As I kneel here a living man, I swear that I will neither forget nor forgive the doers of this deed. One by one I will hunt them down to their death, and if I fail to keep this oath may my heart rot in my body while I walk the earth alive!" Slowly and firmly came the words from his lips; then, rising to his feet, he seized his rifle, took a last look at the body, and hurried from the room.

Brown had returned to the stockade and had informed Hughes that Talbot would soon come.

The flag-of-truce man felt mighty relieved at this intelligence, for he had been in momentary fear that the Irishman might mistake some slight motion on his part for an indication of treachery, and "plug" him instantly, in obedience to the order Brown had given. So Hughes had remained as quiet as a mouse, not daring to stir. Judge, then, of his surprise when Talbot appeared above the stockade and proceeded to take deliberate aim at him.

CHAPTER XLIII. A FEARFUL DEED.

"HELLO! take care! I'm a flag of truce!" Hughes yelled, at the top of his lungs.

But Talbot was glaring along the barrel of the rifle with the eye of a madman, and Jimmy Hughes' life wouldn't have been worth an hour's purchase, had not Brown, perceiving the state of mind that Talbot was in, jumped upon the boulder by his side and forcibly restrained him.

"For Heaven's sake, Dick, don't fire!" Brown cried in Talbot's ear; "this man has never harmed us; to hurt him would be nothing but murder!"

Talbot glared at Brown for a moment; then slowly he lowered the muzzle of the rifle.

"You are right," he said, slowly. "I begin to think that I am going mad."

Hughes somewhat recovered his equanimity when he saw that the deadly muzzle of the rifle no longer threatened him.

"See hyer, gents," he said, "I've come to try to settle this fuss up, someway. Thar's bin a heap of men killed."

"And whose fault is it?" demanded Talbot, sternly. "We are here with arms in our hands to protect our property. When we are assailed, then woe to the assailants. We have not attacked any man; we have simply defended ourselves."

"Yes, I understand that," Hughes said; "that's your side of the story. Now the other party say that they are the lawful owners of this mine, and that they came to take peaceable possession of what belonged to them, and that you committed an assault upon them."

"Did they need an army to back up their peaceable design?" asked Talbot, bitterly. "These men resorted to force and by force they were met. We are in possession of the property; if it does not belong to us, let the law step in and take it from us."

"But we have no courts of law down hyer, you know," Hughes remonstrated.

"So much the better for us, and so much the worse for them," Talbot retorted. "There are courts at Yreka, though; let the men that claim the mine go there and fight us."

"Then you absolutely refuse to give up the property?"

"Do you suppose that you are talking to a couple of idiots, Mister Mayor?" exclaimed Talbot, angrily. "But the next attack will come in such force that you can't resist."

"Bah! Go and talk to the wind!" Talbot exclaimed, contemptuously. "You can't bluff us down with threats. We're playing a lone hand here and we hold the winning cards. Fifty men may be able to take this stockade, but they'll lose twenty men in the attempt. Then, after the stockade is taken, we can retreat to the tunnel, and we can whip a hundred there. Now go ahead with your game; count up your men and p'le in. Just now I don't care much whether I live or die; maybe I would rather die than live."

"But can't the affair be arranged any way?" said Hughes. "Suppose you resign the property into my hands until the law settles who it does belong to?"

"Oh, no; we reckon we can hold it," Talbot replied, curtly.

"This is your final answer, then?"

"Do you want to be told so a dozen times?" Dick exclaimed, impatiently.

"Mind, I warn you that this will end in the death of all of you," Hughes said, half turning around as if to depart.

"I reckon we'll have a heap of company a-crossing the dark river," Talbot said, significantly.

"I give you one last chance," Hughes said, impressively; "will you surrender this property peacefully? I pledge you my word, as Mayor of the city of Cinnabar, that I will see that you have a fair show for your rights."

"When we go out of the Cinnabar mine, it will be feet first, I reckon, and four men apiece to carry us." There was no replying to this grim answer of the superintendent of the Cinnabar mine, and Hughes returned to relate the failure of the flag of truce.

Talbot, descending from his perch by the wall, noticed, for the first time, the body of the faithful O'Rourke.

"Dead," he muttered, his brows contracted, "killed in a quarrel which was nothing to him."

A deep sigh came from Talbot's lips.

"He would have it, you know," Brown observed, seeing the deep impression that the death of the Irishman had made upon the superintendent.

"Blood seems ever to haunt my footsteps," Talbot observed, mournfully. "Innocent blood, guiltless of wrong, that but for me would not be shed."

Brown, through one of the loop holes, had turned his attention to watching the movements of the enemy.

"Any signs of an attack?" asked Dick.

"No; I reckon that they will wait until dark, and then go for us," Brown suggested.

"We must prepare for that, then."

"What do you think of doing?"

"Taking refuge in the tunnel; we can easily form a barricade in the mouth of it."

"That's so, and we two kin hold it ag'in' a hundred."

"Yes, we must provide ammunition, provisions, and water. Will you go the house and transport the things, while I will keep watch here?"

Brown readily understood Talbot's reluctance to again enter the abode where the bolt of death had stricken one so near and dear to him.

"Sartin," the foreman replied; "and if you see any sign of a hostile demonstration, sing out, and I'll be with you in the wag of an antelope's tail."

Brown departed at once upon his mission, while Talbot, seated on a boulder, watched and waited for the foe to come.

But the enemy had suffered far too severely to care to again rashly dare the strength of the defenders of the stockade.

Time passed on; lower and lower sunk the sun, and at last it disappeared altogether; the twilight was at hand—the skirmish line of the night's sable army.

Then, as the darkness thickened, a movement was visible upon the part of the enemy. Dark figures commenced to move to and fro in the gloom.

Quickly taking the weapon of the dead O'Rourke, Talbot and Brown retreated to the shelter of the tunnel, where the latter had built a barricade of boulders at the entrance.

Clambering over the barricade, the two took post behind it. Then, for the first time, Brown thought of the body of the murdered woman, and spoke regarding it to Talbot.

"I had a purpose in letting it remain in the house," Talbot answered. "I wish these bloody villains to look upon their handywork. If they are men and not fiends, the sight should strike terror to their guilty souls."

Brown said no more; words were useless in reference to such a mournful topic.

Darker and darker grew the night; the breeze stirred the cedars on the hill-side, and played amid the leaves of the junipers.

Then to the ears of the two men came the sound of men scaling the stockade wall, and a loud yell proclaimed their victory as they entered the fortification which had been so boldly defended.

Talbot, clutching his rifle eagerly, peered through the darkness, waiting for a chance for vengeance. But the assailants were careful to keep within the dark shadows cast by the shanties within the inclosure. They felt pretty sure that the desperate defenders of the Cinnabar mine were concealed within the tunnel, and were not eager to expose themselves to the deadly aim of the repeating rifles.

"I really reckon that they ain't a-goin' to trouble us," Brown observed, after waiting ten minutes or more and perceiving no signs of an attack.

"They do not dare to attack us."

Then Brown began to sniff the air as if some peculiar odor was offending his nostrils.

"Say, don't you smell something?" he inquired of Talbot.

"Yes, what is it?"

"It smells like something burning."

Hardly had the words passed his lips, when a column of flame shot up on the air from the little shanty which was storehouse and office combined.

A minute more and the light, tongue-like flame came through the windows of the large house.

"Kingdom come!" exclaimed Brown, in excitement, grasping Talbot by the arm as he spoke; "the skunks have fired the buildings!"

"So it appears," Talbot replied, quietly.

"But, Dick, the body of your wife?" Brown gasped.

"Will have a funeral pyre worthy of her pure soul," the husband said. "What matters it how the body comes to dust, whether by the slow process of rotting in the earth or by the action of the purifying flame? The burial of the Roman lords will do for her. No flame yonder as pure as her soul, or as bright as her shining worth."

Brown was appalled by the calmness of his companion. A man with the strong old New England notions, the burning of the dead body seemed to him almost as horrible as the murder of the sick woman.

The flames leaped up higher and higher as though they aspired to reach the sky. Larger and larger they grew until they extended to the stockade fence, and within ten minutes all the woodwork within the inclosure was in a blaze.

CHAPTER XLIV. IN THE TUNNEL.

As the flames burst forth in their fury, the blaze lighted up the darkness of the night.

Brown, incautiously, had remained near the entrance of the tunnel, and some of the besieging force, lurking behind the boulders, making use of every "coigne of vantage" to screen them from the fire of the men concealed within the tunnel, perceived the burly figure of the foreman, and saluted him with a shower of bullets.

With an exclamation of pain, Brown drew back.

"You are hit?" Talbot inquired, anxiously.

"Yes, cuss 'em!" Brown growled; "they've plugged me in the side, hyer. I reckon 'tain't nothin' more than a scratch."

But the deep and long-drawn sigh of pain that came from Brown's lips, despite his efforts to repress it, convinced Talbot that the wound of the foreman was a painful if not a dangerous one.

Cautiously, Talbot peered into the open space, lit up by the lurid flames, which were so rapidly reducing to ashes the property of the Cinnabar Company. Dick thirsted for a chance to avenge Brown's hurt.

Each man, though, of the attacking force had too

keen a dread of the deadly rifles of the desperate men concealed within the recesses of the tunnel, to wantonly expose themselves to almost certain death, and so snugly had they concealed themselves, that Talbot looked in vain for a mark for his rifle.

Higher and higher leaped the flames, and then, at last, with a loud crash, the roofs of the two houses tumbled in, and the walls collapsed.

A great shower of sparks, a dense cloud of smoke, and after these, blazing embers alone marked the spot whereon the shanties had stood.

Along the stockade the flames still burned, but only fitfully, like so many huge torches lighting up the darkness of the night.

"Wal, Dick, I reckon that this hyer speculation has come to a 'tarnal smash," Brown observed, quite sorrowfully, as the shanties yielded to the flames and came down all in a heap. "Nary a hundred thousand dollars will we rake outen this hyer mine."

"We have one consoling thought, and that is, that the other party won't profit by our loss," said Talbot, grimly.

"Do you reckon that Congleton had the buildings set on fire on purpose?" Brown asked.

"No, I think not; he and this sport, Kentuck, started the thing, but the machine has got too strong for 'em now, and is running itself. Some of the bummers of the town probably set the shanties on fire, so as to get a chance to steal the goods contained in them."

"The Cinnabar Company is done for now, anyway," Brown remarked, sadly.

"Yes; but the mine remains."

"I reckon that it will never do us much good."

"Perhaps not; but by heaven no other man shall gain by it!" Talbot exclaimed, with sudden and fierce energy.

Brown was astonished by Talbot's manner. It was the first burst of passion that he had seen him give way to since the death of his wife.

"I reckon that I don't quite understand what you mean?" Brown observed, dubiously.

"How this affair will end, it is of course impossible for me to say; we may be killed here, but if I escape with my life, I swear that no mortal man shall ever work this Cinnabar mine. I'll haunt it like a specter, and for every ounce of gold dug from the bowels of this rock I'll claim a human life."

The fierce energy with which Talbot spoke completely astonished Brown. He began to fear that the brain of his companion had been affected by the terrible events that had occurred in the last few hours.

Just as Brown was about to ask Talbot what he thought the end of the struggle would be, a sudden twinge of pain came from his wound, and compelled him to utter a groan of pain.

Talbot turned anxiously.

"I'm afraid that you are badly hurt!" he exclaimed.

"I reckon that it ain't much," Brown replied, striving to bear the torture; "but I am bleeding a few."

"Suppose we draw back to the angle in the tunnel, and there I can examine and bind it up," Dick suggested. "I have some matches in my pocket."

"But they may jump in on us."

"That is not likely, for they cannot possibly discover that we have retired. Besides, the angle is as strong a position as this one."

"All right; I r'ally feel weak."

It was little wonder, for Brown's wound was a very severe one.

Talbot assisted the foreman to the designated spot, and there, by the light of the matches, burning one after the other, succeeded in binding up the wound so as to stop the weakening flow of blood.

Then the two returned to their former position. During their absence from the mouth of the tunnel, not the slightest manifestation of an attack had come from the besieging force.

The hours passed slowly away. The flames of the burning stockade had died out after consuming about a third of the fence.

The moon came slowly up, and cast her pale light over the scene, which bore such terrible witness to the evil passions of mankind.

The embers smoldered, and the light smoke curled up gracefully on the air, the smoke-rings plainly visible now in the moonlight, but the silence of death reigned supreme within the little inclosure.

The foe had not abandoned their position, though; for, every once in a while, a sound would fall upon the ears of the two watchers that plainly indicated that the tunnel was besieged. Now it would be the clear ring of a gun-stock, carelessly dropped upon a rock, and again the muttered hum of voices in conversation.

And then a careless besieger, reckless of the keen-eyed men whose rifles guarded the tunnel entrance, lit a match and started a pipe.

The little sputtering flame shone above the top of the boulder behind which the man was concealed. Talbot marked the spot, although the fellow was securely sheltered, and seemed to bid defiance to a shot. The faint glow died out; the pipe was lighted, and the smoker proceeded to enjoy the consolation of the fragrant weed; carelessly sheltering himself, he allowed the bowl of the pipe to project beyond the rock. Talbot, with finger on trigger, had watched the place; the red coal of the pipe, glowing in the darkness, like a little eye of fire, guided his aim. The hammer fell, and the leaden ball sped within an inch of the smoker's nose, striking the pipe from his lips, and loosening one of his front teeth.

With a howl of pain, the man rolled over on his back, and roared out that his mouth had been shot off.

Provoked by the skillfully-aimed shot, a perfect shower of balls pattered against the rock, wherein appeared the dark entrance of the tunnel, looking like a gate to the shades below.

Neither one of the defenders were touched by the fire, and they laughed, as they heard the angry oaths of the assailants rising on the air.

Midnight came.

Still the besiegers lay on their arm; still the two desperate men kept watch and ward.

And then the cold, gray lines that heralded the coming of the morn began to line the eastern sky. Day was near at hand.

Few words had passed between the two during the vigil of the night. Talbot was brooding over his wrongs, and thirsting for vengeance, while Brown was endeavoring to conceal the pain his wound was

giving him, and was speculating how the affair was going to end.

With the coming of the morning light, the line of besiegers retreated to a safe distance—beyond rifle range—from the mouth of the tunnel.

Talbot, who could now plainly see his foemen, as they did not trouble themselves to seek concealment, saw that they completely surrounded the tunnel from the rocky wall on the north to the same rocky wall on the south, thus cutting off all chance of escape.

Dick had meditated making a bold dash through the besieging line at the coming of the daylight, but he saw at once that there was but little chance of succeeding in such an effort. And as for attempting to scale the wall of rock into which the tunnel penetrated, it would have baffled a squirrel.

Brown, too, had changed wonderfully in the few hours that had elapsed since he had received his wound. His usually ruddy face had grown quite pale, and Talbot became convinced that if Brown did not receive proper medical assistance within a very short time, the chances were that his life would be in danger.

And while he was meditating upon this point, Hughes stepped forward from the besieging line, bearing as before, a flag of truce in his hand.

Brown's face assumed a more cheerful expression. Talbot, who had been watching him keenly, understood the meaning of the change.

The foreman was "weakening," possibly he feared that his wound was mortal. It did not take Talbot many seconds to make up his mind. His first thought had been a desire to put a ball through the bearer of the white flag.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE END OF THE STRUGGLE.

AFTER Hughes had advanced a short distance, he was apparently called back, for he faced around and returned.

This gave Talbot a chance to discuss the situation with the foreman.

"You are hurt pretty bad, old man," he said, quietly.

"Wal, I reckon it's a little more than a scratch," the foreman admitted.

"You need a doctor's care."

"I reckon so."

"Suppose we can make terms with Hughes, will we surrender?"

"Jest as you say, pard."

"But what are your ideas on the subject?"

"Play the game your own way and I'm with you," Brown replied, slowly.

"I suppose that if we hold out, the end must come sometime. When our ammunition is gone, the game is up," Talbot remarked, thoughtfully.

"Yes, that is so."

"Well, old fellow, I guess we'll surrender—that is, if we can make any decent sort of terms."

"Jest as you like; the fact is, Dick, I rally think that I am done for."

An expression of pain came over Talbot's face.

"And you have suffered in my quarrel, too!" Dick exclaimed, grasping Brown's huge hand within his own delicate fingers.

"A durned sight I have!" Brown retorted. "I reckon it was my fight as well as your'n."

"Brown, for my own part, I am careless whether I live or die, except that life would give me time to have a bloody revenge for the wrong that these hounds have done me; but I feel convinced that, with proper care, your wound would not be a mortal one. So, old fellow, if we can make terms we'll give up the ship."

"Now don't bother about me; jest go ahead at your own gait. I'm with you, either for life or death!" Brown protested.

Silently Talbot pressed the brawny hand of the foreman. The two men thoroughly understood each other.

The days of Damon and Pythias had come again. The New World has had its heroes, demi-gods in their might, but no poet to chronicle their deeds in mighty verse.

Then again Hughes advanced, bearing the white flag.

Talbot showed himself at the mouth of the tunnel.

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Talbot, let us end this awful business!" Hughes exclaimed, pathetically.

"Come on, Mr. Hughes, and let us hear what you have to say," Talbot replied.

Hughes at once accepted the invitation, and advanced to the entrance of the hole in the rocky wall.

"Gentlemen, this has been an awful affair, and I want to stop it in some way," Hughes said, earnestly.

"Tell the men over yonder to go about their business; that will end it," Talbot said, laconically.

"They won't do it, Mr. Talbot. They are all joined together now, but if they separate, they know very well that you will be mighty apt to try and git squar' with some of 'em."

"Their heads are level there!" Talbot said, tersely. "I reckon I shall call upon some of the 'pilgrims' concerned in this little affair to step up to the captain's office and settle, one of these days."

The manner in which Talbot spoke made the Mayor shiver.

"Well, now, Mr. Talbot, you might as well call the thing squar'!" Hughes ejaculated. "You folks have killed about a dozen men outright, but that's neither here nor there; I've fixed the matter up all right. Now, thar ain't no kind of sense in fightin' about this hyer mine any longer; the thing has gone to 'tarnal smash, and I reckon it would take a heap of money to put it in running order ag'in. The boys are jes sick of this hyer hull thing and they are willing to quit if you will."

"As I said before, let them walk off and not threaten us with arms in their hands, and that will settle it."

"Mr. Talbot, as I jest explained, they ain't willing to do that, 'cos they are afear'd that you will be mighty apt to jump onto some one of 'em, the furst good chance that you git."

"What proposition do they make?"

"Furst and foremost, for your party to lay down your arms and surrender—"

"And be murdered in cold blood the minute afterward," Talbot said, bitterly.

"Jest hear the thing through, furst!" Hughes ex-

claimed. "You lay down your arms and surrender; then sign a pledge that within twenty-four hours you will leave this hyer region and that you will never return to it. And on my part I will guarantee that neither you nor Brown will be molested in any way."

"Well, that seems fair enough," Talbot observed, thoughtfully. "But, see here, Mister Mayor, what assurance have we that after we have given up our arms we shall be protected from violence?"

"I pledge my honor as Mayor of this hyer city of Cinnabar," Hughes said, with great dignity.

"Will you sign an agreement to that effect?"

"Certainly."

"What do you say, Brown?" asked Talbot, turning to the foreman, who was sitting on a rock a short distance from the mouth of the tunnel.

"Go ahead; whatever you say I'll stick to," Brown replied.

"For Heaven's sake, Talbot, accept!" cried Hughes, anxiously. "What better terms could you want? The mine is ruined now, anyway. No use of fighting about it any more. Of course, you must know that you can't hold out in this hyer tunnel forever. The end must come sometime. Hyer's a hundred or more ag'in' two on you; sometime you're bound to go under. Now, hyer's a fair chance to git out. You've jest made the biggest kind of a fight; why, thar's bin nigh onto a dozen killed."

"We'll accept," Talbot said, curtly. "Go and draw up the articles of agreement, bring them here with two witnesses—any two good, square men; I'll sign and surrender."

"Now that is sensible, Talbot; best thing you could do!" Hughes exclaimed, with an air of great relief. "I'll see that the squar' thing is done, now mind; jest give you the clean white article, and no mistake."

"But suppose the friends of the men that have been hurt in this fight should try to take vengeance upon us after we surrender and give up our arms?" Talbot asked, not altogether easy in his mind.

"I'll see that that is all right; don't you worry 'bout that!" Hughes replied, confidently. "I'll jest fix a police guard for you, and if any man dares to lay a finger on you, I'll shoot him down myself, right onto the spot."

"That's fair enough," Talbot observed; and then, as Hughes turned to depart, he called after him: "Hughes, by the way, just warn the fellows over yonder about advancing within range of our fire until you return, for we don't surrender until we read the paper and see that it's all O. K."

"Now, Talbot, I wouldn't do anything that wasn't on the squar', you ought for to know I wouldn't; Jimmy Hughes don't go back on his word, nary time!" the Mayor exclaimed, in a reproachful sort of way.

"All right; no harm in having the matter understood," Talbot replied.

Hughes walked rapidly toward the besieging line, and Dick watched him with a peculiar expression upon his face.

"I am half-afraid that there is some treachery under this," Talbot murmured.

Brown overheard the muttered words.

"Don't surrender, Dick," he said.

"Oh, we might as well," Talbot replied. "Hughes was right; we can't hold out here forever. The end must come sometime. There is a chance that Hughes will see that the agreement is kept. He has always been a fair, square man, and I can hardly believe that he would lend himself to any breach of faith. He has pledged his word; I reckon he'll keep it."

Within half an hour Hughes returned, accompanied by two prominent store-keepers of the city, Isaac Pollock and David Lynch by name.

After exchanging salutations, Hughes gave the articles of surrender to Talbot to read.

They were extremely brief, only stipulating that, in consideration of Talbot's party laying down their arms and pledging their word to leave Cinnabar City within four-and-twenty hours and never to return to it, the Mayor of Cinnabar City would guarantee them safety from all molestations.

This was satisfactory. All the parties, including the two witnesses, signed their names, and the surrender was complete.

Hughes then held up his hand as a signal, and a party of ten armed men, headed by the Chief of Police, rapidly advanced.

"Have to put both of you in the jail till nightfall, 'cos it wouldn't be safe for you to attempt to leave town before dark," Hughes observed. "Of course you understand that there is a good deal of bitter feeling ag'in' you."

Talbot merely nodded his head. He knew that unless he was protected, his life would be in instant danger the moment he stepped from the shelter of the tunnel.

Both Brown and Talbot had given up their arms, but the superintendent, mistrusting danger, had thrust a little toy of a seven-shooter inside his shirt-bosom. If he was to be murdered, he had determined that he should have company on his way to the "happy hunting-grounds."

An hour later the two men were shut up in the jail shanty, while a howling mob roared outside, thirsty for blood.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE LAST OF THE "LUCK."

THE shanty which had been set apart as a place of confinement for culprits was only a little, one-story; one-room building, situated just about half-way between the Cinnabar mine and the center of the town.

The two prisoners and the armed guards occupied it in common.

It was very evident that, had not Hughes taken the precaution to protect the prisoners, they would have fared badly at the hands of the enraged mob.

And even after the two were safely housed in the shanty, and the door had been closed and barred, the angry murmurs of the throng outside could be distinctly heard within the jail.

Talbot did not seem to heed the noise at all, and Brown was entirely too sick to pay any attention to the loud-vaunted threats.

As it luckily happened, one of the armed guards was a doctor—the only one, by the way, that the city boasted—and after considerable trouble, he succeeded in extracting the ball which had remained in

Brown's wound. This afforded some little relief to the sufferer, and as the doctor pronounced the wound not dangerous, although severe, the burly foreman began to feel better.

Possibly, if the two prisoners had been aware of what was taking place outside of their prison-pen, neither one would have taken matters so calmly.

After the surrender had taken place, Kentuck left his party and joined Congleton, who, at a safe distance, had watched all that had transpired.

The two followed a short distance behind the armed guard that conveyed the prisoners to their quarters, listened for a few minutes to the angry exclamations of the crowd, after the two men had disappeared within the calaboose; then, without taking any part in the heated discussion that was in progress in reference to "lynching" the men who had surrendered, Kentuck and Congleton walked slowly up the street toward the Last Chance saloon.

Few words passed between them until they entered the private apartment of the gambler. Each was busy with his own reflections, and, although they had triumphed and attained the object for which they had toiled, yet the victory had been dearly won.

Both men were pretty well exhausted, for neither had got much sleep during the vigil of the night.

Kentuck produced the brandy, and the two refreshed themselves with a generous dram.

"Well, what do you think 'bout things?" asked Kentuck, in a sort of meditative way.

"We've won the trick, but it will cost a heap of money to repair the damage," Congleton replied, reflectively. "How did it happen that the buildings were fired?"

"That I can't explain, except that some galoot did it on purpose, so as to get a chance to help himself to the valuables. I noticed that feller that says his name is Joe Bowers hanging around the house, and I saw him afterward with a pile of shirts on his arm. I kinder think he started the blaze. It was done durned quick, anyway."

"Did you hear or see anything of Talbot's wife?" Congleton said, with a covert glance at the face of the gambler.

"No," Kentuck replied, after quite a little pause; "I reckon that she went up in the fire. I heard say that she was sick. I tried to get into the house, but the smoke was too much for me, and drove me back."

"That's rough, isn't it?"

"You bet!" the gambler exclaimed, laconically. "If I was sure that it was that Joe Bowers who started the fire, I'd send him to a hotter one than he'll ever kindle in this world!"

"What's the programme now?" Congleton asked, suddenly.

"Do you suppose that this man Talbot is going to be content to quit the game and levant?" demanded Kentuck, answering one question by asking another.

"Well, I don't know; what is your idea on that p'int?"

"That either he must die or we will. I know him now! He ain't a-going to quietly trot out of this town; the first thing we know, he'll lay in wait for us and measure us for coffins."

Congleton's face turned a shade paler at this abrupt declaration.

"He has pledged his word, you know, to go, and agreed never to return."

"Would you keep sich a promise if you were him?" demanded Kentuck.

"Well, I don't know," was the speculator's guarded reply.

"I wouldn't!" the gambler exclaimed. "Tain't in mortal man for to do it. I tell you what it is, rocks, we've got to do for both of them or they will do for us. It is no use tryin' to mince the matter. It's our lives ag'in' theirs, and I don't propose to be wiped out; no, not by a jug-full."

"Hughes has promised that they shall not be molested," Congleton observed.

"He's Mayor of the town, and a pretty good judge, but I reckon I know a better one," Kentuck said, shrewdly.

"Who?" Congleton inquired, rather at a loss to guess the gambler's meaning.

"Judge Lynch; that's a court that thar's no appealing from. I reckon that he'll make quick work in this hyer case if he once tries his hand at it."

Congleton pondered over the matter, as if debating the probabilities.

"Hardin, you're right!" he said, at last. "We should be acting like a couple of idiots if we let these men go. The mine is in our hands now, for this affair will break the company, and we kin buy up the property for a song. But if these fellows are let go, they'll be mighty apt to trouble us. But do you think that we can start Judge Lynch after them?"

"Didn't you hear the talk on the street as we came along?" Kentuck demanded. "I tell you what it is, the boys are hot for blood. Do you s'pose the men that have been killed ain't got any friends? Well, I reckon they have, and they're mighty anxious to squar' the matter up. It's all talk now, you know, but thar's deeds back onto it. All they want is a leader, some man to cry out for Judge Lynch, and then it won't be long afore he's elected."

"But even then, whoever is appointed Judge Lynch might hesitate to execute these two men," Congleton observed.

He was not very well posted in regard to the summary and sweeping manner in which Judge Lynch generally arranged matters brought before his august tribunal.

"Don't you be skeered 'bout that!" Kentuck exclaimed. "Thar's bin men enough killed to hang a dozen. We must start the machine, and then it will run itself all right. Come, let's go for it; nothing like striking when the iron is hot."

The sport helped the speculator to more brandy, took a potent draught himself, placed the bottle in its usual abode, and turned to leave the room. As he faced around, his eyes fell upon the bird-cage hanging in the center of the apartment.

An exclamation of surprise fell from the lips of the gambler, for the bird was not to be seen.

Hastily bringing a chair, by its aid he examined the cage. The bird was on the floor, flat upon its little back, with its claws extended, dead as dead could be.

With a look of sorrow upon his pale features, the gambler took the little bird from the cage and stroked his plumage.

"I reckon that this hyer deal don't mean no good to me," Kentuck said, solemnly.

Congleton remembered the gambler's superstition, and therefore was not astonished at the emotion he exhibited at the death of the bird.

"What seems to be the matter with it?" he asked. "A stoppage of the breath, sport," Kentuck replied, quietly. "That is all that ails it. The bank is shot up; it's cashed its checks and 'lit' out. The little thing hasn't been well since the night when Talbot—curse him—cleaned me out and made me shot up shop. Pard, I am r'ally afraid that thar is some bitter bad luck ahead for me."

Congleton, not at all superstitious, wondered that a man of iron nerves, like the cool and calculating A. J. Hardin, esquire, should allow such a trifling circumstance as the death of a Canary-bird to produce such a deep impression upon him.

"Oh, that's only an idea of yours."

"Mebbe it is," Kentuck admitted; "but between me and the bedpost, pardner, I would rather have lost a thousand dollars than had this little cuss die."

Kentuck deposited the bird in its cage again, heaved a deep sigh, and then proceeded to examine his weapons.

The speculator rather wondered at his precautions, but said nothing.

"I guess I'm 'heeled' all right," Kentuck said, at last; "let's git it!"

The two proceeded at once to the street. It was plain at the first glance that the war-feeling had not at all weakened in its force. Groups of excited miners, varying in size from three to ten, were clustered in front of the different saloons, all loudly discussing the one leading subject, and nearly all denouncing Talbot and Brown in the most vigorous manner.

To epitomize their remarks, the Cinnabar men had interfered in behalf of the heathen Chinese; they had trampled on the rights of the free white man; they didn't believe in liquor-selling; they wanted "niggers" for workmen, to whom they could dictate just what they should do; they had sold goods out of their store lower than the regular shop-keepers. In fine, they were a couple of scalawags, and hanging was too good for them.

Kentuck and Congleton approached the largest of these crowds, assembled in front of Hughes's hotel. After listening to the loud talk for a few minutes, Kentuck "put in his oar."

"I'll tell you what it is, fellow-citizens: what we want is Judge Lynch, and right away, too!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XLVII. JUDGE LYNCH.

The proposition coincided with the humor of the crowd. The smoldering ashes of lawless passion raging in the miners' hearts needed only the breath of a leader to produce a flame.

"That's 'bout so!" exclaimed one of the bystanders, a stalwart fellow, whose "pardner" had fallen in the fight.

"Straight as they make 'em!" yelled a well-known voice, and the original Joe Bowers ducked his head admiringly to Kentuck, much to the annoyance of that gentleman, who fairly hated the very sight of the greasy bummer.

"I jes' go my leetle pile on Andy, every time!" announced Mr. Bowers; "when it comes to solid chunks of wisdom, A. J. Hardin, late of the State of Kentucky, is the man for your money. Judge Lynch is what you want, gentl'men, an' I jest nominate my old side pard, Andy, fur the office."

"No, no!" exclaimed Kentuck, instantly, who had wit enough to understand that a more reputable citizen than he was known to be, was necessary for the position. "I respectfully decline; I ain't the man for the office, but I can p'int him out!"

"Go in, Andy, and I'll hold your hat, me noble juke!" ejaculated Bowers.

"Who is he?" demanded one of the miners, and the rest took up the cry.

"Mr. Congleton here," and Kentuck indicated the special agent with a wave of his hand. "He's posted in the law and will jest fill the bill."

"I reckon that we don't want much law," growled the stalwart fellow who had first spoken, and who burned to revenge the death of his companion. "Thar's bin men killed, an' we know who killed 'em. All the law we want is the limb of a tree and a rope strong enough to string the murderers up with."

"Yes, yes," murmured two or three more in the crowd, friends of the dead men.

Kentuck saw the time had come to strike.

"See hyer, fellow-citizens!" he exclaimed, "this hyer hull business ought to be settled inside of an hour. Thar's bin blood spilt and the men that spilt it have got to answer for it!"

"That's the talk! an' I'll back you if nary other man in this hyer valley does!" cried the stalwart miner, drawing a heavy revolver from his belt, and flourishing it menacingly.

"I'm with you, too!" exclaimed a second one of the crowd.

"And me!" said a third.

"I'm your mutton, Andy, ole fel!" roared Joe Bowers, shaking his fist in the air, evidently in a state of great excitement.

Kentuck was annoyed at the bummer's persistence in outranting the ranters, but he pushed straight on to the object he had in view.

"Hyer we air, ten, fifteen good men and true; I say, clean out these two men to onc't. It ain't enough for them to leave town; they must be made to settle for what they have done. Judge Lynch is the man to handle 'em. Talk is cheap and it takes money to buy land; now we want work. I nominate Mr. Congleton for Judge Lynch; who says anything ag'in' it!"

"Yes, yes, Judge Lynch!" the crowd of miners roared, almost as one man.

The noise attracted the attention of the rest of the miners congregated in the street, and the group surrounding Kentuck began to rapidly augment in numbers.

"But Hughes has got them locked up in the calaboose and a guard over them," suggested one of the throng.

"What right has he to protect these two murderers?" demanded Kentuck, fiercely.

"Well, he's Mayor of the city, you know," some one in the crowd replied.

"And who made him Mayor of the city, eh, fellow-citizens? that's whar I put it!" cried the sport,

at the top of his voice. "We did! we, the citizens of this hyer town. Besides, I'd like to see the man that dar's to dispute with Judge Lynch when he goes fur a red-handed murderer."

"Bully for Lynch! Go in, old man!" and similar cries rose on the air from the excited miners.

"Ag'in I nominate Mr. Congleton hyer fur Judge Lynch; is it a go, gentl'men?" cried Kentuck.

"Yes, yes!" yelled the miners in chorus.

"Now let every man that's 'heeled' step out onto the middle of the street fur to form Judge Lynch's police, and I'll be the first!"

And with the word, Kentuck strode into the center of the street, and every man in the group, promptly drawing a weapon, followed him.

An unarmed man was the exception not the rule in the streets of Cinnabar.

Even the bummer, Joe Bowers, produced a six-shooter from amid his rags and flourished it wildly in the air.

Kentuck noticed the weapon in the hands of the vagabond, and the thought occurred to him that the bullet that came so near putting an end to his existence only a few nights before, was probably fired from that very identical weapon. But he had other fish to fry now, though, and at once proceeded with his work.

"Hyer we are now, thirty men, with weapons in our hands and justice in our hearts!" cried Kentuck, as he glanced over the throng who had fallen into line, soldier fashion. There were over thirty armed men now, and more were coming every moment. "I've kinder taken the lead in this hyer thing, but I'm ready to resign to any better man that wants to take holt and run the machine."

"No, no—go it—deal away, old man—bully for Andy!" the crowd responded, disjointedly. The last remark was uttered by Joe Bowers, who had been favoring the miner next to him with an account of how many men he had killed with the six-shooter that he was flourishing about so recklessly.

"Now, Judge, we're ready for action!" exclaimed Kentuck, eager to move upon the jail and take possession of the prisoners.

Congleton improved the opportunity to define his position.

"Fellow-citizens, I accept the office of Judge Lynch, and if I don't put these murderers through a course of sprouts, then thar's no water in yonder river nor no truth nor honesty in mankind. We'll try 'em first and hang 'em afterward!"

Yells from the crowd, and a remark from Bowers that it would save time to hang them first.

"We're going to Mayor Hughes, and as free citizens of this young city of Northern California, the metropolis that is to be, we will demand that these hyer murdering villains be given up into our hands to be tried for their crimes. And if he refuses, fellow-citizens, we'll jest impeach this Mayor and 'lect a new one!"

More yells from the crowd, and then "the army" took up a line of march toward the calaboose.

There was a small window in the side of the shanty, which was dignified by the title of jail, and the first intimation that either the prisoners, or the armed guard that watched over them, had of danger was when a tow-headed youth stuck his head in through the window and delivered the startling intelligence that Judge Lynch was up and that he was "going" for the Cinnabar men.

The captain of the guard at once requested the youth to "light" out and hunt up Jimmy Hughes, and inform him of the trouble brewing.

The messenger departed instant, and the captain, who was the chief of police—Cinnabar City had possessed that metropolitan luxury after the election of Hughes—gathered his men by the door and window, ready to do battle with the followers of Judge Lynch, although it must be confessed that both the captain and his men appeared to be more anxious for the fight than they really were, for in truth they cared little to engage in a deadly encounter with the force that was approaching in such martial array.

"Don't you be skeered!" cried the captain, vauntingly, addressing the prisoners. "I reckon it's only a leetle fun that the boys are having. I reckon they know who's chief of police in this hyer town, and if they don't they'll be mighty apt to find out, if they come foolin' round this hyer ranch."

Talbot only smiled, in his calm, quiet way; he did not put much faith in the vaunted ability of the redoubtable captain of police.

Brown, who was stretched at full length upon the floor, with his wound bandaged up, turned uneasily and looked up into Talbot's face.

"Does your wound hurt, Bill?" asked Dick, mistaking the reason of the movement.

"No, not much; but what do you think of this Lynch business?" Brown asked, anxiously.

"What do I think, old fellow?" Dick said, in his quiet way; "why, I think that we are both doomed men, and that the quicker we make our peace with this world and prepare for the next the better."

"But we have Hughes's word that we should not be molested."

"He will be powerless to do any thing against a mob."

"But these men ought to be able to keep them off."

Talbot shook his head.

"They will not endanger their lives for us, old fellow. I was afraid of this when I agreed to surrender. I had half a mind to stick to the tunnel and die like a rat in a corner, fighting to the last; but it's too late to think about that now."

Hoarse cries outside interrupted the conversation.

The bloodhounds were at hand.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PUNIC FAITH.

"HELLO! don't come so near or we'll fire into you!" exclaimed the captain, pointing the shot-gun with which he was armed at the throng outside the house.

"Ef you do, gentle Thompson, thar'll be a dead police capt'n round hyer in two minutes arter," responded Joe Bowers, who was one of the foremost of the crowd.

A yell of derision from the crowd, which was not at all complimentary to the captain of police, accompanied the bummer's speech.

The worthy captain was wrathful, but from the

looks of the armed throng he concluded that discretion was the better part of valor.

"What do you want, anyway?" he asked, sullenly. "In the name of Judge Lynch, I demand the two prisoners now in your hands," said Congleton, stepping forward.

Talbot recognized the voice.

"That's the Frisco sharp," he observed, quietly, to Brown. "I reckon our goose is cooked, old fellow."

Brown merely uttered a low groan in reply; since he had received his wound, half his fortitude seemed to have deserted him.

"I don't know anything 'bout Judge Lynch," the captain answered, doggedly. "Mayor Hughes gave these men into my charge and I am responsible for 'em."

"We'll give you a receipt fur 'em, William," suggested Joe Bowers, jocosely.

The crowd only smiled at this remark; they were getting impatient and had almost lost their relish for joking.

"Judge Lynch will take all the responsibility from your shoulders," Congleton remarked.

"It's no use talkin'!" exclaimed Thompson, blustering; "I can't give up the prisoners. I want you to understand that all this hyer business of Judge Lynch is ag'in' the law."

"We don't ask your opinion upon that p'int!" returned Congleton, sharply. "We are full-grown men, and not babies, and I reckon we know what we are doing. We are not ag'in' the law, for we are the law. But we don't want any more talk. We want the two men that you've got inside that shanty. We ask you for 'em peaceably, and if that don't answer, we'll take 'em from you by main force."

Then the crowd growled ominously, and those nearest the shanty began to play with the locks of their weapons in an extremely significant manner.

"I'll bet ten dollars to a Chinaman's pigtail that I kin plug the capt'n in the left eye, first time!" cried Bowers, very vociferously, and taking deliberate aim at the captain.

Thompson drew his head in the window, and his face assumed a nervous expression.

"See hyer, gentl'men, this ain't right!" he expostulated. "I've got orders from the Mayor to protect these hyer two men. We are all armed in hyer."

This attempt of the captain's to intimidate the followers of Judge Lynch was received with a shout of derision.

"And we're armed out hyer, and we mean business, too," replied Congleton, significantly. "We've got men enough hyer to chaw you all up. But we don't want to do that. We talk to you as fellow-citizens. We ain't got anything ag'in' you, but the two men inside thar we're going to have. We want you to understand that. We're going to have 'em if we have to kill every man that thar is inside that shanty."

The captain looked at the armed followers of Judge Lynch, then upon his own men clustered by his side. He saw written on every face the reluctance to resist the demand of Judge Lynch. In truth, it was but the sheerest folly to think for a moment of contending with the overwhelming force that surrounded the shanty.

Then a brilliant thought occurred to Thompson.

"Will you hold on for a moment till Mayor Hughes comes?" he asked, addressing Congleton. "I've sent for him and he'll be right along. Then you kin settle the hull matter with him. If he says that it's all right, why that jest takes the responsibility off my shoulders."

While Congleton was hesitating for a moment whether to yield to the request or not, a cry was raised from the outside of the crowd that Hughes was coming.

It did not take the worthy Mayor long to arrive upon the scene of action.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" he exclaimed, half out of breath, "I must protest against this action. It's contrary to law."

"Who made you Mayor of this town?" asked Congleton, abruptly.

Hughes was rather astonished at the bluntly-put question, but proceeded to answer it, not suspecting its drift.

"I was elected by the voters of the city."

"Exactly; and I, Judge Lynch, was elected by the voters of this city," Congleton rejoined. "We derive our authority from the same source, but in this business, Mister Mayor, I reckon that if you are going to undertake to protect these hyer two men, and should put the thing to vote, the town would go a hundred to one ag'in' you."

"But see hyer!" exclaimed Hughes, perceiving that he was getting the worst of the argument, "I pledged these men that if they would surrender peaceably they should not be molested."

"The court is well aware of all that, Mayor Hughes," Congleton replied, blandly. "We don't want you to do any thing that isn't all fair and squar', sir. No, sir, this hyer court would feel hurt if she compelled the Mayor of this hyer city to break his word even to red-handed murderers like the two men inside that air shanty."

Hughes breathed a little easier at this speech, and the crowd began to wonder what in thunder Judge Lynch was driving at.

"No, sir, this hyer court don't ask you to go back on your word; no, sir, not if she knows herself, and she thinks she do! The court only wants to ask you one question, Mister Mayor; when you pledged your word that these hyer two men should not be molested if they would surrender, did you give the word of Jimmy Hughes, the landlord of the Dry-Up Hotel, or the word of James Hughes, Esquire, Mayor of the City of Cinnabar?"

"Why, as Mayor, of course," replied Hughes, who couldn't see what on earth Congleton was driving at.

"And who gave you authority, Mister Mayor, to pledge the faith of this hyer City of Cinnabar?" There was an ominous silence in the crowd as Congleton thundered forth the question.

Too late, Hughes understood that he had made a blunder; but he made a clumsy attempt to repair his error.

"Why, I thought that in my capacity of Mayor I had the right to give such a pledge."

"Where in the law of the State of California, or in the law of any other State in this hyer Union, will you find sich power as you have taken upon yourself, delegated to a mayor?" demanded Congleton,

sternly. "No, sir; it ain't in the statutes—it can't be did. You have no more authority to pledge these men that they should not be harmed for the crimes they have committed, than you have to give a fee-simple of Cinnabar City to the territory of Oregon."

"Drag 'em out!" yelled a hoarse voice from the crowd, and the rest took up the cry.

Hughes made one last effort. "But, gentlemen, consider; I pledged my word for their safety! If you kill these men their death will lie at my door!" he exclaimed, with outstretched hands.

"Mayor Hughes, you have blundered, innocently no doubt, but the law cannot be cheated of her rights," Congleton replied. "These men will have a fair trial, although there is not the slightest doubt as to their guilt. If you don't want your policemen killed, order them to deliver up those prisoners to us."

"No, I'll be cursed if I do that!" cried Hughes, who was in such a rage that tears stood in his eyes. "Thar they are; take 'em if you like; I wash my hands of the hull affair."

The crowd needed no second bidding, but rushed at once tumultuously into the shanty, the door being unbarred by the men within, who filed quietly out, without attempting to resist the entrance of Judge Lynch's men.

Talbot had risen to his feet and stood before Brown, who was sitting upon the floor with his back against the wall.

The superintendent merely outstretched his hands as the armed men rushed in, just as if they had been a lot of boisterous children.

"There is no necessity for any roughness, gentlemen," Talbot said, coolly and quietly. "I shall not attempt to offer any resistance, and as for Mr. Brown here, he is pretty badly wounded, and is incapable of showing fight. Handle him gently, if you please, for even if we are going to die, there is no use of causing us unnecessary pain beforehand."

The men, who had rushed into the shanty expecting to meet resistance, and intending to drag their prisoners out, feet first if possible, were somewhat astonished at the coolness of their reception, and even the roughest and boldest of them felt abashed. They stopped short and looked at Talbot, as if they were puzzled as to what sort of a man he really was.

"If you want to bind my wrists, gentlemen, I am agreeable," Dick said, extending his delicate white hands. "It is hardly necessary to take that precaution with Mr. Brown, as he is too weak to run, even if he wanted to."

"You're a cool sharp, anyway," one of the miners remarked, as he bound Talbot's slender wrists together tightly.

CHAPTER XLIX.

JUSTICE—SO CALLED.

JUDGE LYNCH's men and the prisoners proceeded to the open air. Two of the men had assisted Brown to rise, and supported him between them with considerable rough tenderness. Talbot walked among his captors more like a leader than a prisoner.

Kentuck and Congleton had consulted together while the men were in the shanty, and had arranged the programme.

The prisoners were placed between a file of men and the command to march given. A wagon, drawn by a dilapidated-looking mule, brought up the rear, and in the wagon was a large coil of rope.

Many a glance was cast at the wagon and its contents, but no questions were asked. Each man understood well enough to what use the rope and wagon would be put.

A short half-mile from the town, a good-sized oak tree reared its head, a hundred paces from the river.

The oak stood alone; no shrubbery nearer than the hillside, a hundred paces south of the tree. The wall of rock which existed in Cinnabar City had here dwindled down to a steep, irregular hill, completely covered by a dense chaparral.

The procession halted near the tree. The cart was driven under a stout limb that projected from the parent trunk at an angle of forty-five degrees. Obedient to instruction from Kentuck, an agile young fellow climbed the tree, fastened one end of the rope to the projecting branch, and the other end, which descended nearly to the wagon, was fastened with a running noose.

Talbot surveyed the preparations with a careless eye; and as for Brown, the walk had so wearied him that he was fain to lie on the ground, half insensible.

Everything being ready for the execution, the court of Judge Lynch convened.

Talbot's quiet face was a true index of the state of his mind. To him, court and judge alike were a farce—a ghastly one, perhaps, but still a farce. He knew that his death had been resolved upon, and that sentence had in reality been given before the trial commenced.

"The court will at once proceed to business," Congleton said, briefly. "Richard Talbot and William Brown, formerly superintendent and foreman of the Cinnabar mine, in the City of Cinnabar, what have you to say in regard to your crime? You, Talbot, answer first."

"Nothing!" replied Dick, laconically.

"The prisoner admits his guilt—"

"No, I don't!" cried Talbot, sharply.

"I understood you to say that you had nothing to say!" Congleton exclaimed, sternly.

"Did you put the question guilty or not guilty to me?"

"That was understood."

"Of course, it's all understood!" Talbot said, contemptuously, "and you're just wasting time with this nonsense. You don't want to try me; you want to hang me; that's all cut and dried. Why don't you go ahead, and not fool about the matter like a pack of schoolboys."

Fully conscious as he was of the truth of Talbot's words, yet Congleton wished to preserve the semblance of a fair trial. He was afraid that, even at the last moment, the boldness of the foredoomed man might win some friends to interfere.

"No, sir, you are wrong; you will have a good fair

trial; if you are innocent you have nothing to fear from this court. Judge Lynch only troubles the guilty."

Talbot's face clearly showed his disbelief, but he held his peace.

"Now, sir are you guilty or not guilty?"

"I have not heard any charge made against me, and therefore cannot answer," Talbot replied, coolly.

Congleton began to lose his temper; the calm insolence of Talbot, even with the shadow of death hanging over him, was almost too much for "Judge Lynch" to bear.

"You are accused of murder!" he exclaimed, sharply and angrily.

"Whose murder?" asked Talbot, in the most placid manner possible.

"The men who were killed outside the Cinnabar works yesterday," said Congleton, angrily.

"Well, I don't really know whether I killed anybody or not," Dick replied, with an air of deep reflection. "In self-defense, I admit, I did fire at some men approaching my property with arms in their hands, evidently attacking me for no good purpose; in fact, one of my workmen, Paudeen O'Rourke, was killed by a shot fired by one of them; but whether I killed any one or not, it is of course impossible for me to say. But if I did, I was acting strictly in self-defense, and protecting my own property."

Congleton at once perceived that the quicker he brought matters to a conclusion the better, for each word that Talbot spoke lessened the chances of his conviction in the minds of the bystanders. So he instantly proceeded to call for the men who had witnessed the attacks and the gallant defense of the stockade.

Three men, each of whom had lost a friend in the fight, distinctly testified that they saw Talbot and Brown fire from behind the shelter of the stockade, and saw the men fall mortally wounded by their balls.

Congleton called no more witnesses.

"The crime of murder is proved beyond a shadow of a doubt, and these two men are the guilty ones," Congleton said, frowningly; "and therefore I sentence them to be hanged by the neck until they are both dead, and may Heaven have mercy on their guilty souls."

Talbot's lip curled in contempt; the words were blasphemy to him.

A long-drawn breath came from the crowd as the sentence was pronounced, but no one raised a finger in Dick's behalf, so thoroughly had popular opinion—fickle and uncertain as the wind—turned against him.

"Execute the judgment!" cried Congleton, turning to Kentuck.

With a half-smile of triumph upon his face, the sport approached the two prisoners. Well it was for Kentuck that Talbot's hands were bound, or else there would have been a tragedy there under the shadows of the oak not set down in the programme of Judge Lynch's court.

Brown had been assisted to his feet by the two men who had taken charge of him.

"Let me die first, old partner," he said, feebly, extending his hand and grasping one of Talbot's palms.

The form of iron-hearted, tiger-limbed Dick Talbot quivered for a moment as he looked in the honest face of burly Bill Brown and felt the touch of his trembling fingers. It was only for an instant though that he manifested any emotion, and then again he was the man of ice.

"If you will have the kindness to unbind my hands so that I can take a last gripe of my friend's paw here," he said, to the guard next him, "I shall be much obliged to you."

The man was about to comply, but Kentuck instantly and sternly forbade it. The wily sport feared to give liberty to the man he hated, even at the foot of the gallows. Of course he had no suspicion that Talbot had managed to conceal a seven-shooter within his bosom.

Dick bit his lip; all seemed to go against him; not a chance—not a single loophole for an escape. Many a tight squeeze had he had since his entry into this vale of tears, but never in his life had death seemed so near—so certain, as now. And as he looked around, the sky seemed bluer, the foliage greener, all nature lovelier than e'er before.

"Good-by, Dick; heaven bless you! you've allers bin a true pard to me!" Brown murmured, and then acting under a sudden impulse, threw his arms, weak as he was, around Talbot and strained him to his heart. And as Brown did so, he felt the pistol concealed in Dick's bosom. Then at once he understood why Talbot had requested to be unbound. A smile came over his pale face; a new-found hope, springing up in his heart, whispered that Talbot would yet escape the impending danger.

"Never say die!" he whispered; "and if you do get clear don't forget old Brown who stuck to you to the last." Again he pressed Dick's manacled hands within his own broad palms, and then, assisted by his attendants, he walked to the wagon. The will of the foreman was strong although his steps were weak.

He mounted into the wagon, and a low wretch, who had volunteered to act as hangman, adjusted the noose around his neck.

With the near approach of death, Brown's strength seemed to increase.

"Hark ye, mates!" he said, in a clear, audible tone that reached the ears of every man clustered around the oak, "when I swing at the end of this rope I shall be a murdered man. I am innocent of anything except striking in self-defense. I've only got one wish, and that is, that all of you within the sound of my voice, when your time comes, may be able to die with as light a heart as I do now. I forgive you, for you poor, miserable sinners don't know what you are doing."

Then the old, rough foreman of the mine crossed his hands piously on his breast, and repeated the Lord's prayer in a low voice. Clear and full came the "Amen" from his lips, more like the pean of triumph than the last words of a condemned murderer.

"Now, drive on your mule team," he said, in a loud, clear tone, gazing around with calm yet earnest eyes.

The whip cracked—the wagon started; a body writhed in the air at the end of the rope; a long-drawn breath from the crowd, and then a sudden

hush, and a murdered man swung from the branches of the oak.

"Now, Talbot, your turn!" cried Kentuck, unable to conceal his joy.

CHAPTER L.

WHAT LOVE CAN DO.

FOR about fifteen minutes the body of the unfortunate foreman swung in the air; then, the doctor examined it, pronounced the man dead. The rope was cut just above the noose, and the body came tumbling down heavily to the earth.

Acting under Kentuck's commands, the remains were deposited under a low bush by the side of the river.

"The vultures will make short work of him," the gambler observed, contemptuously, as he hastened back to consummate his vengeance.

The wagon was drawn back to its former place, a fresh noose rigged in the rope, and again the instrument of death was ready.

Talbot walked quietly to the cart, and, despite his manacled hands, climbed into the wagon without aid.

With a calm and serene expression he gazed around him, taking his last look on earth.

The hangman commenced to adjust the noose around his neck, but in a very bungling manner.

"How deuced clumsy you are," Talbot exclaimed, impatiently; "undo my hands, and I'll fix the thing myself."

"Oh, I guess it will do, the hangman replied, carelessly. "Anyway, I'll be more careful next time," he added, with a grin.

Then Talbot raised his hands and affected to assist the fellow in adjusting the rope.

"I'll make it worth a thousand dollars to you if you will unfasten my hands," Talbot said, rapidly, and under cover of pretending to assist the hangman.

"Got the money with you?" the fellow asked, delaying time by bungling with the rope.

"No; it is concealed in the tunnel up at the Cinnabar mine. I will tell you the exact spot so that you can get it after I am dead. What difference does it make to you or the rest of them, whether I die with my hands tied or not?"

"That's so, pard; it's a bargain," replied the hangman.

The conversation had been carried on in a low tone, and so rapidly as to almost escape the notice of the interested lookers-on.

"I'll do it quietly, so that the rest won't know anything about it," the fellow added, feeling in his pocket for his knife.

Hope once more beat high in Talbot's bosom. His hands once free, a desperate chance for life remained. Fortune had ever favored him, and why not now at this dread moment when, more than ever, he needed her smiles?

Already he was calculating the advantages of the ground. His hands at liberty, a vigorous buffet would settle the hangman, a leap to the ground upon the side of the wagon nearest the chaparral, and then, only three or four men were between him and the hill-side. He had seven bullets in the revolver concealed within his bosom, each one worth a life in the hands of a man so well used as he was to quick, snap-shots. If he could only gain the shelter of the thicket, the chances would be a hundred to one that he would be enabled to defy all pursuit. True, he would be a target for the shots of all the crowd assembled around the gallows from the moment he leaped from the cart until he reached the hill-side, but he, as well as any man living, knew how little was the chance of the man aimed at being hit by an indiscriminate discharge of weapons fired at random. He had seen too many public affrays, where both the principals escaped uninjured and the innocent bystanders alone had suffered, and the parties separated by the length or breadth of a room, and emptying the contents of two or three revolvers at each other.

His hands once free, it was ten to one that he'd make the "rifle."

The hangman was fumbling in his pocket for his knife, but so clumsy was he that Kentuck, who was standing some ten paces off, had his attention attracted, and approached to see what the fellow was about.

"Hello! what's the matter? why don't you go ahead?" Kentuck asked, angrily.

"It's played, pard; I can't do it," the fellow whispered, hurriedly, to Talbot; then he turned to the gambler. "I was only a-feeling fur my handkerchief to blow my nose."

The crowd received this explanation with a guffaw; a handkerchief was a long-forgotten luxury to the majority of them.

"Curse your nose!" exclaimed Kentuck; "go ahead with your work and let's have no more foolin'. Do you s'pose that we want to wait hyer all day?"

"All right; I'll fix it up in a jiffy!" and the fellow proceeded to arrange the noose.

"You had better be careful, or we'll try the consarn on you!" Kentuck said, threateningly, as he retreated a few paces.

Talbot's pale face did not betray the slightest emotion as the action of his mortal enemy destroyed so suddenly the bright hope which had sprung up in his heart; but he almost despaired; one chance alone remained, and that but an uncertain, wavering one.

A minute more and the hangman announced that all was in readiness for the execution.

"I should like to say a few words to the crowd, if there is no objection," Talbot said, addressing Congleton.

That worthy hesitated for a moment, but when he reflected that the noose was around Talbot's neck and Kentuck was at the head of the mule, ready to give the signal to draw the cart away from under the doomed man, he saw that there was no objection to the prisoner's request, so he nodded his head.

"I should like to have my hands unbound for a minute while I say what I want to," Talbot remarked.

Congleton was half inclined to grant the request, but catching the look upon Kentuck's face, he understood that the gambler considered the measure a dangerous one, so he contented himself with shaking his head, thus denying the petition.

Talbot's last hope was gone now; no avenue of escape was open to him; yet calmly, and with an unshrinking brow, he confronted the grim King of Terrors.

"Well, if I can't speak without my hands being bound, I don't care to speak at all," he said quietly and calmly.

For the first time the thought flashed across Kentuck's mind that Talbot had meditated an escape if he succeeded in procuring the removal of the bonds that confined his wrists, and the sport inwardly laughed at his own shrewdness in baffling the desperate man.

"If you are ready, we are!" Kentuck cried, the satisfaction of swelling triumph, perceptible in his voice.

"Go ahead!" Talbot replied, just as cool at this moment of peril as when, in the gaming-room of the Last Chance, he had defied the power of the "bank," and succeeded in cutting the claws of the "tiger."

Kentuck raised his arm as a signal for the mule to move on.

Seconds are sometimes of wondrous value in this life, and the second that intervened between the raising of Kentuck's arm and the driver starting the mule attached to the wagon, in obedience to that signal, the result of which would be to tighten the rope around Talbot's throat and launch him into the other world, was productive of wondrous results.

Scarcely had Kentuck extended his arm, when from the chaparral which lined the hillside came a flight of barbed Indian arrows, followed by the blood-curdling yell of the red braves.

Twenty of the unsuspecting miners went down, stricken near to death, and among the twenty were the hangman in the wagon and the driver who stood at the head of the mule. The mule, too, dropped dead in his tracks, an arrow driven entirely through him.

Taken entirely by surprise by the Indian attack, Judge Lynch, his court and lookers-on forgot entirely the prisoner, who stood in the wagon with the rope around his neck.

A scattering, irresolute fire the miners poured upon their concealed foe, each man acting on his own hook. Kentuck alone of all the throng remembered the prisoner; determined not to be cheated of his revenge, he plucked the revolver from his belt and fired at Talbot; the shot, hastily directed, gave Talbot the deliverance he had craved, for it struck the knot of the cords that bound his hands and cut it half away. With a single effort now of his tremendous strength, Talbot forced the cords apart.

Maddened with rage at the result of his shot, Kentuck fired a second time; the hasty aim was false, and the ball whistled harmlessly through the air a yard at least away from Talbot.

Then, with the quickness so natural to him, Dick drew the concealed weapon from his bosom, and fired at the gambler. The ball struck the cheek bone, glanced downward and plowed its fearful way until it passed out, shattering the jaw.

With a terrible groan, Kentuck fell to the ground, his face bathed in blood. The gambler was evidently past praying for in this world.

A second flight of arrows from the chaparral followed the first, and ten more men went down.

After the first discharge of arrows, some ten or fifteen of the miners, headed by Joe Bowers, all arrant cowards at heart, started with a yell for Cinnabar City. They had no stomach to encounter the wild, red braves.

Suffering so severely by the fire of the Indians, discouraged by the flight of their companions, and lacking the firm rein of a leader, it was little wonder that the miners gave way and fled in wild disorder.

With loud yells of triumph, the savages came from their ambush. All the fighting-men of the Shasta tribe were there, led by their great Hee-ma Nang-a, and with the chief came Yuet-a, the Shasta princess.

The Indian girl had saved the man she loved.

The retreat of the whites became a rout—a most fearful slaughter. Not until the miners gained the shanties of Cinnabar did they attempt to make a stand against the red foe, and not till then did the Indians give up the pursuit and fall back sullenly to their retreat among the rocks.

Sixty men Cinnabar City lost in that fearful fight.

CHAPTER LI.

THE DEATH TRAIL.

AND with their bloody defeat by the banks of the river, the men of Cinnabar had not seen the last of the warlike braves of the Shasta tribe.

Cinnabar City was surrounded night and day by the hostile savages. The expresses were cut off. All communication with Yreka was stopped, and for a week, at least, the miners had their hands full to prevent the Indians from sacking the town.

The movements of the savages were directed with wonderful skill, and the commander seemed to understand the defenses of the city most thoroughly.

At last, it came to be rumored about that Talbot had not perished in the Indian fight, by the bank of the river, on the day of the "hanging match," as had been generally supposed; but that he was still in the land of the living, and had joined the Indians in their attack on the whites. If this rumor was true, it accounted for the intimate knowledge that the Indians seemed to possess of the strong and weak points of Cinnabar City.

Two or three of the miners swore that they had recognized Dick Talbot, habited as an Indian, and his face covered with war-paint, in the leader of a daring band of braves who had penetrated to the center of the town one dark night, and managed to destroy one-half of the city by means of fire-brands.

Things began to look bad for the young metropolis of the north. Property depreciated. No new men came in, and of the old ones, all that could get away did so.

Cinnabar City at last was "clean busted," to use the forcible language of one of the "pilgrims," escaping northward to Yreka.

Finally the government took the matter in hand and sent a large force into the valley of the Shasta to repress the savage incursions and drive the red-men back to their native lairs.

Several companies of volunteers were raised, too, along the northern frontier, and for about eight months a bloody Indian war raged.

At first the soldiers got decidedly the worst of it, not being used to Indian warfare; and being commanded by a military martinet, who, whatever his merits might be in the drill-room and in the fields of civilized war, was utterly out of place in the mountain region of Northern California, where he had to

contend with a foe as spry as a squirrel and as brave as a grizzly; who only attacked in overwhelming numbers, and who never defended a position, unless it was a natural fortress, rendered almost impregnable by nature.

Then a different officer took command. A man who had won his grade in the swamps of Florida, against the Seminoles; who understood that fuss and feathers were utterly out of place in an Indian struggle.

Within a month the fortunes of war changed; the Indians suffered severely, and finally were driven from the Shasta valley and forced to seek refuge in the canyons in the rear of Mount Shasta. The soldiers pressed them close, and at last brought them to bay in the very same spot where Talbot and Brown had fought Koo-chue, the Hog, and his red McClouds.

The red warriors fought desperately, but, outnumbered and equipped with inferior weapons, they gradually gave ground. At last by a desperate charge, the soldiers broke the Indian line.

Hee-ma Nang-a and the Shasta queen, together with an agile warrior, whose face was strangely painted black and white, who had by their example encouraged the red-men in their desperate struggle, made one last effort to rally the flying warriors.

Vain was the attempt and fearful the cost. Hee-ma Nang-a fell, pierced by a dozen balls; Yuet-a was stricken down by his side by the death-dealing bullets, but the panther-like warrior, who appeared with Hee-ma Nang-a to share the chief command, although exposing himself to a hundred dangers, seemed to bear a charmed life. Dashing up the rocky defile with all the swiftness and strength of the mountain-goat, he paused at the summit to hurl back a forcible Anglo-Saxon curse at the victorious troops, then disappeared amid the chaparral.

It was plainly evident that the supposed Shasta warrior was a white man.

Some of the Cinnabar men in the California volunteers who participated in the fight, swore that, in the parting defiance of the flying brave, they recognized the voice of Dick Talbot.

With the victory in the canyon, ended the Indian struggle; and then slowly, one by one, settlers straggled again into the Shasta valley. But there seemed to be a curse upon the spot; nothing thrived. It was evident, too, that there was some one who seemed to have a spite against the settlers in the City of Cinnabar. The torch of the incendiary fired dwellings by night, and men were waylaid and shot at by day. Strangers to the valley were not troubled much; it was chiefly the old residents who had resided there before the Indian war that were persecuted.

All of a sudden, Mr. Hosa Congleton appeared in Cinnabar City. He had contrived to make himself scarce during the trouble with the savages. Now he came, accompanied by some five San Francisco capitalists, whom he had brought up to the city to inspect the Cinnabar mine, with a view to interest them in working the lode.

The Frisco sharp had become the sole owner of the property, having bought up all the stock for a mere song during the time of the Indian trouble.

At last it seemed likely that he was about to gain the golden end for which he had toiled so hard.

The capitalists examined the mine and declared themselves satisfied that it was a good thing.

Congleton retired to rest that night tolerably well pleased with himself and all the world. He dreamed of nothing but great heaps of gold, and if a few of the lumps were spotted with a stain like that from human blood, the wily speculator gloated over the treasure none the less.

But with the morning light came a change over the spirits of the plotter.

Dick Talbot had suddenly appeared and publicly announced that the Cinnabar mine should not be worked if he had to kill every man with his own hand that dared to put a tool in it.

After hearing of this threat, and learning a few particulars relating to Dick Talbot's life, the Frisco gentlemen concluded that there wasn't as much money in the Cinnabar lode as they had thought, and they must really request to be excused from investing any money in it.

Congleton ground his teeth, but said nothing. With the strangers he departed. But in a month he was back again in Cinnabar City, and with him he brought ten desperate-looking men, and in his pocket there was a warrant for the arrest of one Richard Talbot, and a proclamation signed by the Governor of the State of California, offering five hundred dollars reward for the capture of the murderer, Richard Talbot.

Copies of the proclamation were widely distributed from Yreka to Mount Shasta, and soon Congleton got trace of the man he hated.

With his bloodhounds he started on the trail.

From the canyons north of Shasta he started the outlaw; round the base of the mountain he ran him, and up the valley of the Pitt they went; then Talbot "doubled" amid the rocky defiles near the lake, and threw the pursuers off the track. Reluctant to give up the chase, and believing that Talbot would surely attempt to reach his old haunts by the peak of Shasta again, Congleton led his party down the Pitt.

No trace of the fugitive could he find, and just at the edge of the Devil's Canyon, after a long day's march, Congleton, attracted by an antelope, that promised an easy shot, wandered away from his men. Following the animal heedlessly, he became bewildered in the mountains, and it was near sunset before he found his way back to the river, and then he struck the stream a mile or more below the spot where his party had camped.

Little did the unprincipled speculator dream, as he advanced to the sparkling waters, that the man he had hunted like a wild beast was near at hand.

Surprised by the outlaw, brown-bearded, gaunt, and strong as an enraged lion, Congleton had been bound firmly and suspended from the tree-trunk overhanging the stream, his feet just touching the rock beneath, as was related in the prologue to our story.

Night was ushered in by the groans and prayers of the doomed man, suffering all the torments that the priests of old predicted for those unfortunate souls whose misdeeds on earth condemned them to the power of the Prince of Darkness.

The expedition wondered at the absence of their

leader, but did not search for him until the morning came. They did not have far to go. The "obscene" birds wheeling in great circles in the air over the body of the speculator afforded them an easy clew.

Nor did they wonder long as to who had committed the deed and took upon himself to combine judge and executioner in one.

They understood that Congleton had found the man he sought, but not in the way in which he had hoped to meet him.

The fight for the Cinnabar mine was done. Kentuck, the sport, and Congleton, the speculator, alike had failed, but in their struggle they had blasted forever the life of Dick Talbot. Now a ruined, desperate man, one sentence alone could cheer his heart:

Woe to the men of Cinnabar!

THE END.

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